



Grads2Careers (G2C) Process Evaluation *Final Report*

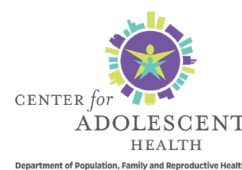


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2018, the Grads2Careers (G2C) initiative was launched to establish a pathway for recent Baltimore City Public School graduates who are not enrolled in four-year colleges or universities into well-paying, high-demand and high-growth occupations in the city. With a partnership between the Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools), the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED), and Baltimore's Promise, there were three main goals: 1) to connect recent graduates to occupational skills training programs and prepare them for jobs in high-growth job fields; 2) to improve the alignment between school and workforce systems as young people transition between high school and employment; and 3) to dispel the 'college for all' mindset among educators and school officials by providing them with additional pathways to careers that do not require a college degree immediately following high school graduation.

The G2C initiative emerged in response to the large proportion of young people, aged 16-24 years, who were both out of school and out of work. Often referred to as "opportunity youth" to convey the benefits of engagement and reconnection, this population faces both short- and long-term socioeconomic consequences as a result of disconnection. While myriad factors contribute to disconnection, the lack of integration between secondary education and the workforce systems makes it difficult for young people to transition from school to employment to achieve their ambitions.

To address this lack of systems alignment and reduce the proportion of young people who are disconnected, the G2C model has included a number of key components: 1) organizational leadership engagement of all implementation partners; 2) a diverse set of occupational skills training opportunities in high growth sectors; 3) a centralized recruitment process with school-based and community-based recruitment facilitated by City Schools, in partnership with participating occupational skills training providers; 4) wraparound supports, including legal assistance and mental health services; 5) a summer prep program for eligible participants who do not meet the reading and/or mathematics proficiency requirements for training providers; and, 6) on-going professional development for training providers including youth development, as well as race, equity, and inclusion with the goal of better serving the older youth (ages 18–21) population.

A three-year process evaluation implemented by the Center for Adolescent Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health revealed that G2C is a feasible program that has demonstrated its ability to adapt to challenges as they have emerged. Key milestones of success from the process

evaluation include a successful recruitment process in which more than 80% of all slots were filled across all three cycles; an improvement in academic test scores among G2C applicants who participated in the summer prep course (participants in both cycles 1 and 2 improved more than one grade level in reading and nearly one grade level in math); young people being successfully placed in employment (43% of those who completed training in Cycle 1; 68% among completers in Cycle 2; and 47% in Cycle 3), and shifting the College Readiness model in the Baltimore City Public Schools to a post-secondary advising model, in which G2C is now listed as an option.

There were also several key lessons learned, such as the numerous challenges associated with data sharing across agencies; barriers encountered by young people and training providers during the shift to a virtual learning environment in Cycle 3 due to the COVID pandemic; the need to expand funding sources; ensure instructors are skilled in communication and participatory approaches; expand youth engagement; and begin career readiness training earlier in a student's trajectory.

While G2C has indeed begun to lay the foundation for building a bridge between the school and workforce sectors, more leadership from the school system and the city is needed to create stronger linkages. This will not only reduce the risk of youth disconnection but will also lead to increased social connections and economic prosperity in the communities that surround young people. The G2C model has shown this can be possible.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the spring of 2018, the Grads2Careers (G2C) initiative was launched to establish a pathway for recent Baltimore City Public School graduates who are not enrolled in four-year colleges or universities into well-paying, high-demand and high-growth occupations in the city. As a partnership between the Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools), the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED), and Baltimore's Promise, one of the major goals of G2C is to connect approximately 400-500 recent graduates to occupational skills training programs over the course of three years and prepare them for jobs in fields such as information technology, biotechnology, health care, construction, transportation and warehousing, and hospitality. A second goal of G2C is to better align the school and workforce sectors to support young people as they transition between school and employment, which is reflected in the shared staffing model of G2C. Finally, the third goal of G2C, which emerged shortly after the initiative was implemented, is to dispel the 'college for all' mindset among Baltimore City Schools by providing educators and school administrators with additional career pathways that do not require a college degree immediately following high school graduation.

To assess the implementation of the G2C initiative, in 2018 Baltimore's Promise awarded the Center for Adolescent Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health funds to conduct a three-year process evaluation. This report presents the results of that work.



BACKGROUND

The G2C initiative emerged from the work of Baltimore Promise’s High School Graduation and Career Readiness Workgroups, in which stakeholders from across the city regularly met over a two-year period to brainstorm how to improve the outcomes of young people about to graduate from City Schools.¹ These workgroups were formed largely as a result of a study from the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC), which followed 4,280 high school graduates for six years between 2009 and 2015. Researchers found that in the fall of 2009, 29% of high school graduates entered a 4-year college, 23% enrolled in a two-year college, and 22% entered the workforce without enrolling in a college. The remaining 26% of graduates had no record of being enrolled in any higher education institution or in the formal Maryland labor market, as evidenced through a lack of wage records.² Commonly referred to as opportunity youth, these were young people disconnected from both school and employment. After following the graduates for six years, researchers found that those who were opportunity youth in 2009 fared far worse than their peers who either directly entered college or the workforce. While 38% of opportunity youth eventually enrolled in some form of higher education, and 79% entered the workforce at some point over the six-year period, these young people earned a median annual income of approximately \$11,000, and about nine percent were earning a living wage.² These findings suggested that if a program could identify young people at risk for disconnection *before graduation* and connect them to employment or education opportunities, it might help prevent youth disconnection and subsequently lead to improving employment and earnings outcomes among young people overall.



The challenge for any program that aims to address youth disconnection, however, is that youth disconnection is caused by myriad systemic factors, including lack of supportive school and home environments, communities with limited employment options, unplanned pregnancy, and punitive school disciplinary sanctions – all of which can lead to reduced academic performance, lower high school graduation rates, negative socioeconomic consequences, and long-term physical and mental health challenges. Additionally, the risk for youth disconnection is inequitably distributed across racial and ethnic groups, signaling that white supremacy and structural racism contribute to disconnection. On a national scale, Native American youth have the highest rate of disconnection at 23.4%, followed by Black and Latinx youth at 17.4% and 12.8%, respectively, and financial and labor market discrimination decrease the salience of protective factors like higher education and employment for these populations.³ In Baltimore, while the overall percentage of youth disconnection was 15.9% in 2019, nearly 25% of Black youth were disconnected compared to only 6% of White youth, demonstrating the persistence of structural racism in the city.⁴

Another key contributor to youth disconnection is the lack of connections and integration across key systems, including secondary education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. This makes it difficult for young people to transition between systems successfully to achieve their ambitions. Ensuring alignment of systems, particularly funding, policy, and support structures related to education and employment, is imperative for keeping youth connected to school and work, and can safeguard them as they navigate their academic, professional, and personal futures.⁵

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF G2C

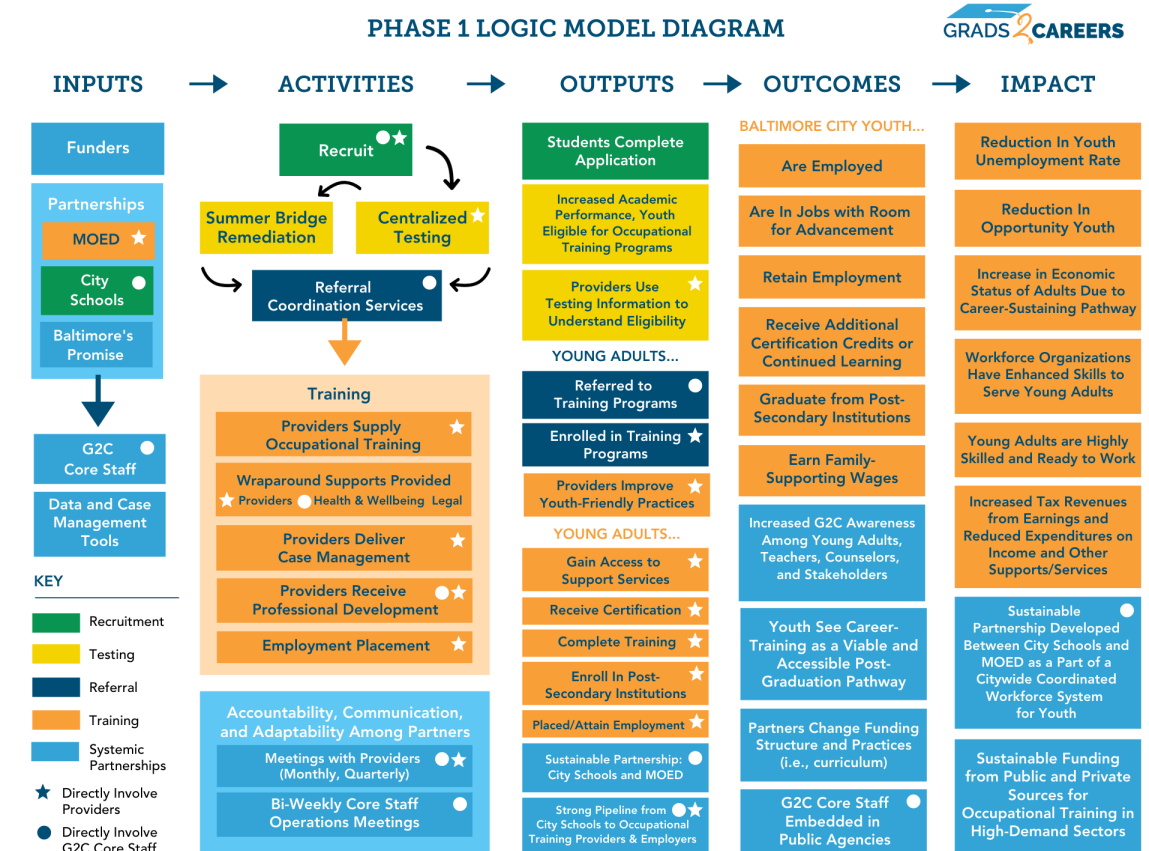
Key Components

To address the complex set of factors related to disconnection, the G2C initiative included several key components:

- 1) The engagement of organizational leadership from all implementation partners.
- 2) A diverse set of occupational skills training opportunities in high-growth sectors.
- 3) A centralized recruitment process with school-based and community-based recruitment facilitated by City Schools, in partnership with participating occupational skills training providers.
- 4) Wraparound supports, including legal assistance and mental health services.
- 5) Summer prep program for eligible participants who do not meet the reading and/or mathematics proficiency requirements for training providers; and,
- 6) On-going professional development for training providers including youth development, as well as race, equity, and inclusion with the goal of better serving the older youth (ages 18–21) population.

Logic Model

The logic model depicted below illustrates how the key components of G2C are expected to lead to changes in outcomes among young people in Baltimore, as well as improve systems alignment between education and workforce development sectors.



The primary inputs for G2C, or the “ingredients” needed to implement the activities, include funding, the implementing partnerships, the G2C core staff, and the data and case management tools. The key activities include 1) recruitment of youth participants, which includes recruitment events in the schools, community, and among providers; 2) centralized testing and a summer prep program to ensure that youth



participants have the needed academic skill requirements for the training programs; 3) referral to the training providers, which often occurs in a cyclical process to ensure a training program is a right fit with the young person; 4) the occupational training programs, which is described in more detail below; and 5) accountability and communication among the key partner organizations to ensure all components of the program are being implemented as planned. Assuming these activities are implemented successfully, the outputs include young people participating and completing the training program, which will then lead to them being placed and retained in employment. At the same time, through the process of aligning both the education and employment sectors, young people, teachers, counselors, employers, and others will understand that career training is a viable post-secondary pathway and G2C core staff will then be incorporated into each of the partner agencies. If these outputs and short-term outcomes are realized, it is then expected that there will be a reduction in youth unemployment and an overall reduction in the number of opportunity youth in Baltimore, in addition to the establishment of a well-funded and well-coordinated workforce system for young people.

Scope of Work for Training Provider Sites

To be considered a training provider site within G2C, interested organizations respond to a request for proposal application and are selected by a team of reviewers including representatives from each implementation partner agency as well as a group of youth reviewers. At minimum, all applicants must be able to demonstrate the following:⁶

- 1) 2-3 years of experience in delivering high quality workforce development models and/or older youth development programs (ages 16-24);
- 2) Ability to offer industry-recognized occupational credential or certification and/or provide in-demand skills that lead to employment in high-demand, career-track occupations with the potential to pay a family-supporting wage;
- 3) Willingness to work in partnership with a system of centralized recruitment through City Schools, in addition to recruiting eligible participants directly;
- 4) Capacity to collect, record, and report data using MOED's Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) system;
- 5) Ability to build employer relationships with evidence of employment placements (must provide letters of support from at least two employers with description of engagement with the program);
- 6) Demonstrated track record of partnering with organizations that provide wraparound supports that reduce barriers to employment for the target population;
- 7) Evidence of understanding the importance of positive youth development practices (and ability to describe how those are or will be incorporated);
- 8) Track record of strong employment outcomes (>70% completion, of those completing >70% placement with a clear plan for post-placement support as needed for both the individual as well as employers); and;
- 9) Ability to track job placement retention for a minimum of one-year post-placement.

Once awarded, according to the contract scopes, awardees need to meet several requirements that involve recruitment, program services, meetings, professional development, training, data collection, reporting, and evaluation (see Appendix 1 for more details on each of these requirements).

Tables 1 illustrates the training provider awardees for Cycles 1, 2, and 3 organized by provider and program track.

Table 1. Training Providers and Program Track by Cycle

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC)	x	x	x
Medical Front Office	x	x	x
Medical Front Office + Phlebotomy	x	x	x
Phlebotomy only	x		
CNA/GNA/PCT		x	x
CNA/GNA	x	x	x
CNA only		x	
GNA only		x	x
PCT only		x	
Pharmacy Technician	x	x	x
Baltimore City Community College (BCCC)	x	x	x
Cabling Installer	x		
Cyber Security/A+	x	x	
CNA/GNA		x	x
Pharmacy Technician		x	x
Bon Secours of Maryland (BSCW)	x	x	x
CNA/GNA	x	x	x
BioTechnical Institute of Maryland (BTI)	x	x	
Lab Associates	x	x	
Maryland New Directions (MND)	x	x	x
Maritime, Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	x	x	x
Hospitality		x	x
Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF)	x		x
Construction	x		x
Urban Alliance (UA)	x	x	x
Land Surveying	x	x	x
Civic Works		x	x
Construction		x	x
Year Up		x	
Cyber Security		x	
Helpdesk/Desktop Support		x	
Code in the Schools			x
IT			x
Npower			x
IT			x
Catholic Charities			x
IT			x
Automotive			x
Childcare			x

Table 1. Training Providers and Program Track by Cycle Continued

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Humanim			x
Administrative			x
Intersection of Change			x
Customer Service			x
Agriculture			x
KRA			x
Construction			x
Life Bridge Health			x
Patient Transport			x
Medical Records			x
NCIA			x
HVAC			x
Unmanned Drone Piloting			x

* In Cycle 3, WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) providers joined G2C

JOHNS HOPKINS PROCESS EVALUATION

Overview

To understand how G2C was implemented across the three cycles of implementation, three overarching aims were proposed:

1. To evaluate feasibility, acceptability, and fidelity of program implementation
 - a. Feasibility was to be determined by accessing data on youth program enrollment, completion, and attrition, and well as delivery of program components.
 - b. Acceptability of G2C was to be assessed by using qualitative and participatory research data collection to explore experiences and perceptions of G2C among G2C staff and leadership, occupational training providers, and youth participants.
 - c. Fidelity was to be evaluated along four key dimensions: *adherence (and its potential variability across sites), quality, dosage and engagement; and program design.*
2. To determine the extent to which systems-level changes and institutional alignment occurred to create a career pathway for youth participants; and
3. To explore potential sustainability and scalability by identifying the primary barriers and facilitators for effective implementation.

DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES AND METHODS

To reach the three overarching aims, the following are descriptions of the primary data collection activities implemented over the past three years.

In-depth interviews among stakeholders

From June – October 2018, initial in-depth interviews among key stakeholders of Grads2Careers were conducted to learn more about the key strengths and weaknesses of the program, as well as the extent to which they all agreed on the overall design and goals of G2C. The selection of individuals to interview was first discussed with core members of the G2C implementation team. Individuals represented various aspects of the program, including overall implementation and design, recruitment, project coordination,

data entry and analysis, summer prep, as well as participants of the program. In total, 25 individuals were interviewed by the evaluation team during this initial round.

In-depth interviews and focus groups among youth participants

From March – June 2019, in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted among young people who had either completed the training program, were about to complete the training program, or had started the program and had dropped out. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the extent to which G2C helped meet the needs of the youth participants and assisted them in job placement. The selection of young people to interview was based on the total pool of youth who had enrolled in one of the occupational training sites. In our initial round of recruitment, we organized the youth participants into four categories: 1) completed program, employed; 2) completed program, not employed; 3) did not complete the program, employed; and 4) did not complete the program, not employed. However, in several cases, youth who were originally listed as being ‘employed’ or ‘unemployed’ had changed, and therefore we recruited primarily based on whether they completed or completed the training program and then verified their employment status at the time of the interview. While we did try and recruit youth who did not complete the program and were unemployed, we were unsuccessful in being able to interview a young person who fit both of those criteria.

A total of 31 young people were interviewed; 19 participated in in-depth interviews, while the remaining 12 were part of the three different focus groups. Focus groups were conducted when several of the youth participants were together at a training program. Tables 2 and 3 below show the sample breakdown by program completion and employment status, as well as whether they participated in an in-depth interview or focus group discussion.

Table 2. In-depth Interview Sample

	Completed Program		Did Not Complete Program		Total
	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	
Female	5	2	5	0	12
Male	5	2	0	0	7
Total	10	4	5	0	9

Among the ten participants who completed the program and were employed, six were employed within the same field as the training program, while five were employed in a field outside of their training. However, among those who did not complete the program and were employed (n=5), all had jobs in fields that were different from the training program.

Table 3. Focus Group Sample

	Completed Program		Did Not Complete Program		Total
	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	
FG 1	1 female	1 female			2
FG 2				4 females currently in program – no job	4
FG 3		5 males, 1 female just completed program			6

Table 3. Focus Group Sample Continued

	Completed Program		Did Not Complete Program		Total
	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	
FG 1	1 female	1 female			2
Total		8		4	12

Pre-test Post-test Surveys

Beginning in July 2019, youth participants who had just started a training program within one of the occupational training sites were invited to complete a 5-minute pre-test survey. All participants who were present on the day of data collection received a questionnaire. The pre-test asked questions to better understand how participants first heard about G2C, what factors did or did not contribute to applying and enrolling into the program, their expectations of the program, an assessment of their soft skills, and identification of any barriers that may interfere with attending and completing the program. Then, beginning in September 2019, post-test surveys were administered to youth participants who were within one week of completing the program. The post-test assessed participants' soft skills (e.g., taking responsibility for one's actions), barriers experienced, experience of the program, and level of preparedness for entering the workforce. The post-test questionnaire also included open-ended questions which asked about specific positive or negative experiences in the program, and how the program could be improved.

Several questions in the pre-and post-test questionnaires were the same to understand how perceptions may have changed between starting and ending the program. In the pretest, these questions asked participants about the areas of growth they hoped to achieve as well as the potential barriers they anticipated would prevent them from completing the program, and in the post-test, the questions asked what they experienced.

Pretest/Posttest sample

The pre-test survey completion consisted of 61 individuals from seven of the 11 career paths (see Table 4). Most respondents were from the career path of CNA/PCT at the Community College of Baltimore County (n=18). The post-test survey completion included 32 individuals from three of the 11 career paths. A total of 20 out of 31 post-test participants were from the career path CNA/GNA at Bon Secours Community Works. Only 18 respondents completed both the pre- and post-test questionnaires and were from three career paths (Lab Associates at BioTechnical Institute of Maryland, CNA/GNA at Bon Secours Community Works, and CNA/PCT at Community College of Baltimore County).

Table 4: Pre-Test/Post-Test Sample

Career Tract	Pre-test	Post-test ¹
a. Helpdesk (BCCC - Baltimore City Community College)	7	0
b. Construction (CivicWorks - Youth Build)	7	0
c. Lab Associate (BTI - BioTechnical Institute of Maryland)	7	6
d. Cyber Security (Year Up)	0	0
e. Helpdesk/Desktop support (Year Up)	0	0
f. Certified Surveying Technician (Urban Alliance)	0	0

¹ An additional round of post-tests were attempted to be collected virtually among Cycle 3 participants, but only 5 participants responded.

Table 4: Pre-Test/Post-Test Sample Continued

Career Tract	Pre-test	Post-test ¹
g. Certified Nursing Assistant/Geriatric Nursing Assistant (BSCW - Bon Secours Community Works)	11	20
h. Certified Nursing Assistant/Geriatric Nursing Assistant/PCT (CCBC - Community College of Baltimore County)	18	6
i. Medical Front Office + Phlebotomy (CCBC - Baltimore City Community College)	8	0
j. Pharmacy Technician (CCBC - Baltimore City Community College)	3	0
k. Hospitality (Maryland New Directions)	0	0
l. Maritime, Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (Maryland New Directions)	0	0
Total Count	61	32

Provider In-Depth Interviews

Between May and August of 2020, a total of six training sites participated in virtual interviews, which included providers from the BioTechnical Institute (BTI), Job Opportunities Task Force, BCCC, CCBC, Maryland New Directions, and Youth Build Civic Works. The primary purpose of the provider interviews was to explore their opinions about the feasibility and acceptability of G2C, as well as the extent to which the COVID pandemic impacted the training program for their G2C participants. Interviews were all recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes.

Systems Alignment Interviews

A total of 21 interviews were conducted between April and July 2021. Individuals were selected based on representing the organizational leadership of G2C (n=4); members of the G2C core team (n=7); funders (n=2); school administrative staff (n=3); and others who have been involved in the original design and/or aspects of implementation of G2C (n=5). The interviews were conducted to examine perceptions about how systems alignment was first envisioned for G2C, how alignment occurred, and what gaps remain for G2C to become a permanent entity in Baltimore. Interviews were all recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes.

Document Review

In addition to primary data collection activities, key programmatic documents were shared with the JHU process evaluation team, which included contract scopes for the training site awardees; initial formation documents, labor and operational reports, the original logic model, Cycle 1 reflection and lessons learned, common performance metrics and definitions, G2C Bloomberg data request, MOED's role in G2C, pipeline analyses, and summaries and presentations related to the project. Each of these were analyzed and summarized and are incorporated into the overall findings for this report. Table 5 below illustrates the specific methods that addressed each aim.

Table 5: Data Collection Methods and Process Evaluation Aims

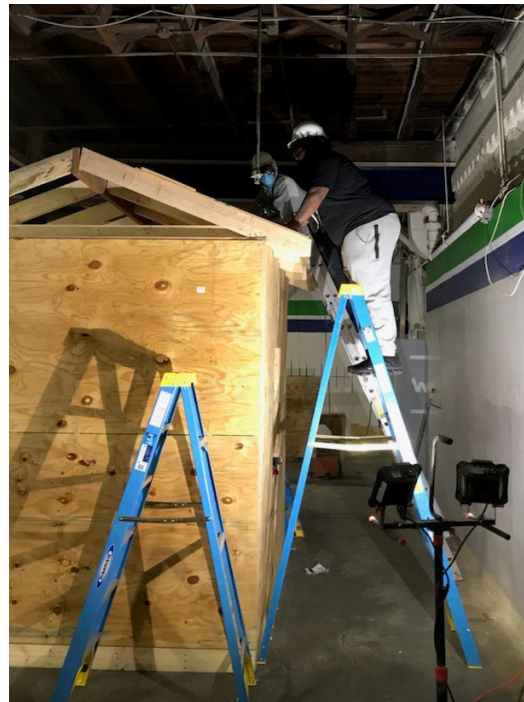
Methods	To evaluate feasibility, acceptability, and fidelity			To assess systems alignment	To assess scalability and sustainability
	Feasibility	Acceptability	Fidelity		
Stakeholder interviews		X	X		X
Youth interviews & FGDs		X	X		X
Pre-test/Post test		X	X		
Provider interviews		X	X	X	X
Systems interviews	X	X		X	X
Document & data review	X		X	X	

This final report summarizes the key findings from the process evaluation of G2C and provides recommendations for how the program can evolve into a permanent entity for the City of Baltimore to prevent more youth from becoming opportunity youth.

RESULTS

Organization of Findings:

To address the primary aims of the process evaluation, which consisted of assessing feasibility, acceptability, and fidelity of the G2C activities, we first organized the findings by the main components of the logic model: recruitment, testing, and referral; Summer Prep Class; occupational training programs; student support services; professional development to providers, impact of COVID, job placement, and systems alignment, future scalability and sustainability. Within each component, a description of the implementation of the component is presented, followed by a summary of data collected from the process evaluation as it relates to feasibility, acceptability, and fidelity. Data collected on the last two aims, which consisted of assessing systems alignment and barriers and facilitators to future sustainability of G2C, are described in the last section of systems alignment. Since this is a demonstration program, relevant changes that occurred between cycles are also described within each key component.



Recruitment, Testing, and Referrals Across Cycles

Description of Cycle 1 Recruitment: In Cycle 1, recruitment was defined as when “recruitment events/outreach were made; one-on-ones were administered with completion of a youth profile, which was then transferred to providers at intake. A completed referral process consisted of the recruitment + referral (including a ‘warm hand-off’).”⁷ While recruitment events/outreach were targeted towards 23 high schools, events/outreach took place at 16 target schools and 2 non-target schools. Reasons for why some targeted schools did not participate included school leadership being unresponsive despite directive language from City Schools and the timing for when recruitment

events occurred. Regarding the timing, the Workforce Recruitment Coordinator (WRC) was not hired until early March 2018, which greatly restricted the window of opportunity for holding recruitment events within schools. Additionally, at that time, the name, “Grads2Careers” had not yet been formalized, and marketing a program called the “Career Pathways Demonstration Program” to high school seniors was challenging. On the positive side, community school coordinators facilitated better success for school recruitment events, although large recruitment events did not occur except for the Mayor’s Job Fair.⁷

A key aspect of recruitment for Cycle 1, and most time consuming, was the one-on-one interview used for recruiting interested youth to training programs. The WRC would meet with an interested youth and complete the ETO form, as well as a consent form. To help a young person decide on the training program, the WRC would review the program catalogs to discuss: 1) whether dates aligned with individual’s schedule; 2) the specific job duties and potential wages; and 3) program eligibility requirements, including being able to pass a drug test as well as pass math and reading assessments. If the young person was not ready to choose at the time of the one-on-one, program catalogs were sent home and the young person was asked to contact the WRC within one week to indicate their choice. Given that these one-on-ones were time intensive and often required case management, the project coordinator of G2C assisted in one-on-ones. Three additional recruitment assistants were hired from April to July 2018 (one of whom remained until October 2018) to help facilitate this process. As described in Cycle 2 recruitment, an additional Recruitment Specialist was also hired in November 2018.

In addition to G2C-initiated recruitment, training providers had a responsibility to recruit, which included marketing specifically for G2C, initiating pre-program communication, and hiring a success coach to help with pre-program case management. During Cycle 1, however, recruitment efforts made by the providers yielded relatively low numbers of recruits primarily thought to be due to not being trained or aware of the ‘high touch’ efforts needed to engage young people.

Description of Cycle 2 recruitment: One of the key changes from Cycle 1 recruitment was that academic testing became centrally administered by G2C using the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS). Students who did not meet the eligibility requirements were referred to Elevation Educational Consulting group, which ran a 7-week paid academic summer prep class to improve reading and math skills for program entrance.⁸ Additionally, G2C staff positions were reimagined to reflect the time-intensive processes of both recruiting in schools and engaging in subsequent follow-up and referral conversations with interested students. The WRC duties were divided into two new positions: a Recruitment Specialist and a Participant Support Coordinator, with new responsibilities added to each new role in addition to those part of the original WRC duties. Also, compared to Cycle 1, school-based recruitment started earlier in the year and included all the training providers who were able to speak about their own individual programs with interested youth.

Specific new tasks for the Participant Support Coordinator (PSC) included organizing and implementing all the academic testing sessions, which included holding a general G2C question and answer session prior to the academic test, conducting the academic testing, and then meeting with students after the test to talk more about their life circumstances and how they could become involved in G2C successfully. These individual engagement sessions were critical for building trust and helped to keep the students engaged in the entire G2C recruitment-enrollment process.⁹ This process continued throughout the Cycle 2 recruitment period – with individual engagement sessions occurring at nearly every testing event.

The Recruitment Specialist was then primarily responsible for marketing and outreach to schools. One new process for school outreach implemented by the Recruitment Specialist was to hold large recruitment events at a single school, in which multiple schools would send potential students to participate and learn

about G2C. To plan for these events, schools were divided into quadrants. The first two of these events occurred at ACCE and Green Street Academy, with all providers in attendance. However, numerous logistical challenges prevented these events from occurring again, including not having enough staff and having the timing of these events impede other activities happening within the schools (occurred during the school hours). Instead, these events became single-school-focused, conducted once or twice monthly, where targeted schools held large recruitment events showcasing representatives from all G2C providers.

Description of Cycle 3 Recruitment: Cycle 3 recruitment started out very similar to Cycle 2, in which school-based recruitment events were organized by the Recruitment Specialist while the PSC held testing and individual engagement sessions. These recruitment and testing events took place from early November 2019 until March 2020. Within that time frame, approximately 320 students submitted applications to G2C; and from that, a total of 78 students had been tested and participated in individual engagement sessions, with 38 placed on a waitlist to be referred to a training program. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in March and all in-person recruitment and testing events were canceled. However, within the virtual environment (primarily through Google Voice and Salesforce), the PSC still engaged with interested students. Different from previous recruitment cycles, during Cycle 3, a total of 39 students referred back to G2C were then successfully re-routed to other occupational skills training providers. In

previous cycles, if a provider referred the student back to centralized recruitment, a second referral wasn't always possible due to the short window of time until the start of the provider training classes. However, because of the extended calendar of training options caused by COVID delays as well as the addition of numerous new WIOA-funded program training offerings, it was easier to re-route students within the same cycle.⁹



Steps of Recruitment

Outreach

Outreach for G2C occurred at school and community events. After attending a recruitment event about G2C, youth can indicate their interest

by completing an initial document. In Cycle 1, a short interest form was completed in person, while in Cycles 2 and 3, an online application was used. The numbers in Table 6 reflect the number of interest forms completed in person for cycle 1, and the online interest form for cycles 2 and 3. Cycle 3 is shown in two columns because the cycle occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and was therefore extended.

In Cycle 1, a total of 819 young people were recruited from events and 49 young people were recruited directly from providers. In Cycle 2, there was an increase in both the number of young people recruited from events and providers (1175 and 63, respectively). In Cycle 3, there was a decrease in both the number of youth recruited from events and from providers, which was largely due to the COVID pandemic (see Table 6 for further details).

One-on-Ones and Testing

After completing the initial document, youth had the option of furthering their interest in G2C either by signing up for a one-on-one discussion with the G2C recruiter or completing an academic test, depending on the cycle. In Cycle 1, one-on-ones were used after interested youth completed an application and chose their program of interest. In Cycle 2, instead of one-on-ones, youth were invited to complete a CASAS reading and math test. After either testing or communicating with the PSC, youth chose their program

and were referred to providers in ETO. In Cycle 3, youth demonstrated their interest by phone/text/email conversations with the Recruitment Specialist or PSC before being referred to a training program.

In Cycle 1, 38 tests were administered by G2C and 55 by providers. In Cycle 2, G2C administered 230 tests and 15 by providers, while in Cycle 3, providers had administered all tests as of 11/30/2020 due to COVID-19. This included in-person and online testing.

Choosing a Pathway

Once youth choose a training program, they are registered in the ETO database. Their information is available to training providers who contact them to continue the application process.

The total number of youth registered in ETO, as indicated in Table 6, includes 49 provider recruits in Cycle 1, 63 in Cycle 2, and 22 in Cycle 3. The number of youth referred to providers from G2C includes only those who were recruited centrally by G2C.

Summer Prep Class

While the Summer Prep Class was not part of the original G2C model, it was instituted to assist youth in need of improving their reading and math skills to be eligible for a training program. In Cycle 1, more youth were invited to the class because not all test scores were available before the start of the prep course due to the different process of recruitment. In Cycle 2, all youth were CASAS tested. In addition, more of the programs in Cycle 2 did not require a minimum reading/math score. In Cycle 3, COVID-19 prevented G2C from centrally administering the CASAS; consequently, training programs with an academic entry criterion administered either the TABE or CASAS.

G2C Training

The totals shown in Table 6 of youth who started and completed occupational training are only by the date indicated for each cycle.

Table 6 Recruitment

Recruitment Step	Recruitment Step Outcomes	Cycle 1 8/1/2018	Cycle 2 8/1/2019	Cycle 3 10/1/2020
Outreach	Attendees at school-based recruitment and other recruitment events	868	1238	1053
	Youth who initiated interest	490	516	798
Interest & Next Steps	Youth completing one-on-one meeting	297	--	--
	Number of youth tested	93	245	150
Choose a Pathway	Youth registered in ETO	263	202	271
	Youth referred to providers from G2C	214	139	249
Summer Prep Class	Applicants referred to Summer Prep Class	88	44	--
	Applicants who participated in Summer Prep Class	68	31	--
G2C Training	Youth starting occupational training	35	54	42
	Youth completing occupational training*	--	11	--

*For Cycles 1 and 3, no trainings had completed by 8/1/2018 and 10/1/2020

Referral: a cyclical process

Once a student is referred to a training program, there are several steps towards ensuring that a student becomes enrolled in each training program.

Some of the key lessons learned from the first cycle included the following:

- 1) Successful recruitment requires 'high touch' case management and skills to get students from the point of referral to the first day of class.
- 2) A Recruitment Specialist was needed to support the work of the PCS to ensure both outreach to schools and constant communication with potential students could be effectively implemented.
- 3) A trusted adult is needed to communicate with the prospective trainee. Several G2C students have reported that they do not respond to calls from unknown numbers because they are afraid of scams or bill collectors. Counselors have also reported that many young people are reluctant to trust programs because they have been let down in the past.
- 4) In Cycle 1, most providers were not immediately following up with students in ETO. G2C staff collaborated with providers to then implement a new policy that providers should contact the students within 48 hours of receiving an ETO acceptance and that they needed to try at least four times using various communication methods before referring the students back to the WRC. For many providers, however, this process was very different from the process used to enroll their typical training populations.⁷

A common challenge in ensuring recruited youth become enrolled is continuous communication. Some providers have said they have reached out to youth up to ten times before they finally receive a response. Interviews with the providers also revealed that even with all the supports and communication in place, there are still external barriers that can prevent young people from enrolling in a training program. One key barrier is transportation, as most students do not have reliable transportation to training locations and internships. While bus tokens are provided, training sites are often too far from where students live, and consequently, bus tokens may not even be sufficient. To address this barrier, one training site provider (JOTF) mentioned that they were assisting students buying vehicles. Another barrier that was discussed by all training providers was housing stability. While providers acknowledged that G2C cannot help with this barrier, it needs to be recognized for this population. Several providers have mentioned helping students find adequate housing, but others said that issues with housing together with domestic violence can often prevent youth from either enrolling or completing the program.

MOST STUDENTS DO NOT HAVE RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION TO TRAINING LOCATIONS AND INTERNSHIPS.

Another key barrier to enrollment was the academic challenges that were commonly experienced among students. As described in the following Summer Prep Class section, many of the occupational training program sites required students to have at least an 8th grade reading level and a 6th grade math level. However, it was quickly revealed that a sizeable proportion of students interested in G2C did not meet these requirements and were referred to a summer prep class before starting their training program. While many students improved their test scores, those who did not were encouraged to find other types of training programs. Finally, obtaining identification documentation (e.g., birth certificates or drivers licenses) was another challenge that prevented several young people from enrolling in training programs.

Key Take-Aways about Recruitment, Testing and Referral:

- Recruitment activities have substantially changed across each new Cycle; in Cycle 2, two new positions were created to organize school recruitment and testing. While the 1-1s were eliminated from Cycle 1, the participant support coordinator (PSC) still conducted individual sessions in conjunction with testing events. These individual sessions are deemed critical for ensuring that potential recruits become enrolled and engaged in the program.
- In Cycle 3, the largest barrier to recruitment was the COVID-19 pandemic; the PSC instead stay engaged with recruited youth via Google Voice and Salesforce.
- Consistent engagement with recruited youth is critical for their enrollment in a training program
- Several external barriers pose problems for recruited youth to enroll, including transportation and housing, as well as academic challenges and obtaining appropriate identification documentation.

How do young people hear about G2C?

When young people were asked about how they first heard about G2C, findings from the pre-test revealed that most respondents (61.7%) heard about G2C through staff at their school or through a friend or family member. Only 12% indicated they heard about G2C from a recruitment event at school or from social media; however, it should be noted that the question was about how students first heard about G2C, which meant they could have heard about the program from other channels later. Additionally, the sample size was small and not representative of the entire G2C youth population. In fact, the youth interviews showed a greater variety of different channels for how they first heard about the program. For example, one female participant said she heard about G2C through a YouthWorks seminar; a male participant said he heard about it at high school; another male through the Baltimore Algebra Project; while others mentioned receiving emails or hearing about it through word-of-mouth. Interestingly, there was no dominant communication channel that was mentioned across any of the youth participants interviewed from Cycle 2.

Summer Prep Program

Purpose and Implementation

The summer prep program was first implemented in 2018 after a large proportion of participants in Cycle 1 (40%) were not meeting the academic requirements, which primarily required having 8th grade reading and 6th grade math levels. BridgeEdu was selected to implement academic remediation for Cycle 1, while Elevation Education was contracted for Cycle 2.

In Cycle 1, academic testing was done by the training providers and the G2C project coordinator using the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) to determine students' academic levels. In Cycle 2, CASAS was used for centralized testing, and different from Cycle 1, was implemented throughout the recruitment period. Another key difference between Cycles 1 and 2 was the eligibility criteria for the summer prep program. In Cycle 1, anyone below the required grade level was permitted to participate in remediation, whereas in Cycle 2, students were eligible only if they were within two grade levels of the required grade level. Those who tested more than two grade levels below the required academic levels were referred to alternative job training programs. A third key difference between Cycles 1 and 2

was that Cycle 1 had a rolling admission throughout the summer prep program with two separate Cycles: one for 4 weeks and another for 3 weeks. Those who did not show much improvement after the 4-week session could stay for the remaining 3-week session. Interviews conducted with BridgeEdu coordinators demonstrated however that rolling admission during the remediation program proved problematic. The quote below from a BridgeEdu coordinator illustrates this challenge.

“Every time you get a new student, it changed the dynamics of the classroom. You could literally see who used to be engaged, but with a new kid, their whole behavior changed.”

This structure changed for Cycle 2, which had admissions stop by mid-July and only had one session that lasted the full 7 weeks for all students.

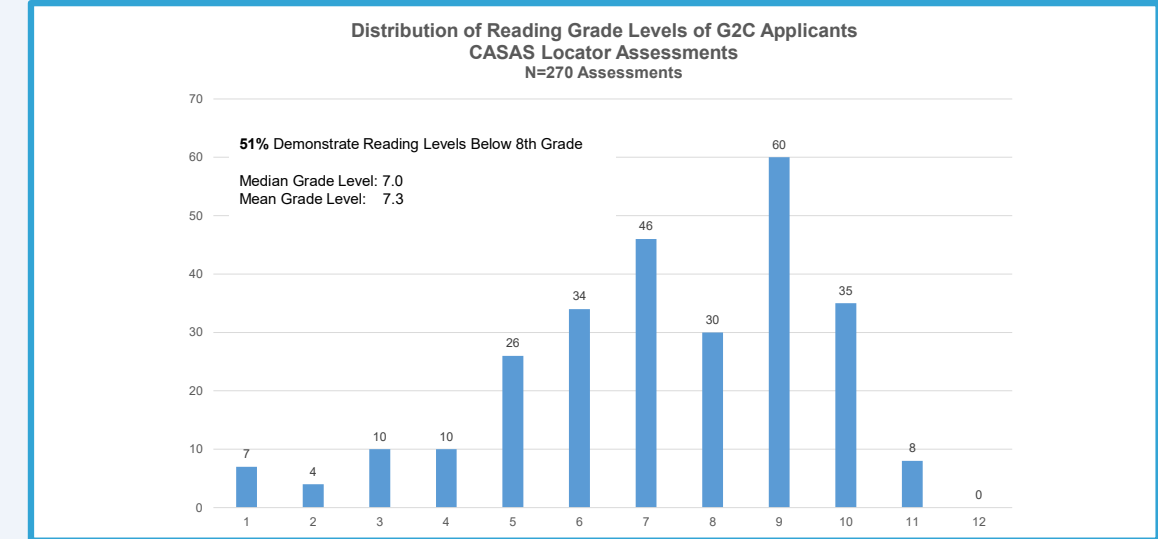
Summer Prep Program Design

Academic remediation materials were developed specifically to the CASAS standards that were determined to be of the highest needs of the incoming participants. Materials were culturally relevant, and instructors included learner-centered readings and activities that were Baltimore-based and socially and racially justice oriented. Interactive technology, such as Kahoot and Google Forms, were used to foster student engagement. Additionally, participants in academic remediation were given opportunities for youth leadership, such as selecting the book for book club, which was “The Hate U Give,” and co-planning the end of program celebration.

Based on the pre-tests for reading among participants, several learning needs were identified: comprehension, understanding the main idea, familiarity with CASAS/Workforce terminology and test taking skills. In math, the primary areas for learning included decimals, fractions, area and perimeter, familiarity with CASAS/Workforce terminology, and understanding common questions.

The figures below provide a snapshot of the distribution of reading and math grade levels of incoming G2C applicants that were tested for both Cycles 1 and 2. More than half (51%) demonstrated reading levels below 8th grade, while 32% demonstrated math levels below the 6th grade.

G2C Summer Prep Class (SPC) Update Incoming Academic Proficiency of All Youth Tested



Academic Remediation Outcomes

Table 7 presents a summary of those who were referred and completed academic summer prep program.

Table 7 Referrals and Completions to Summer Prep Programs in Cycles 1 and 2

	Cycle 1 Remediation	Cycle 2 Remediation
Total Applicants Referred	88	44
Total Participants	68 (77%)	31 (70%)
Total Completed	68 (100%)	31 (100%)
Completed Summer Prep & Completed Training	27 (40%)	16 (52%)
Completed Summer Prep & Did Not Complete Training	16 (24%)	12 (39%)
Completed Summer Prep & Employed after Training	15 (22%)	16 (52%)
Completed Summer Prep & Not Employed after Training	12 (18%)	20 (65%)

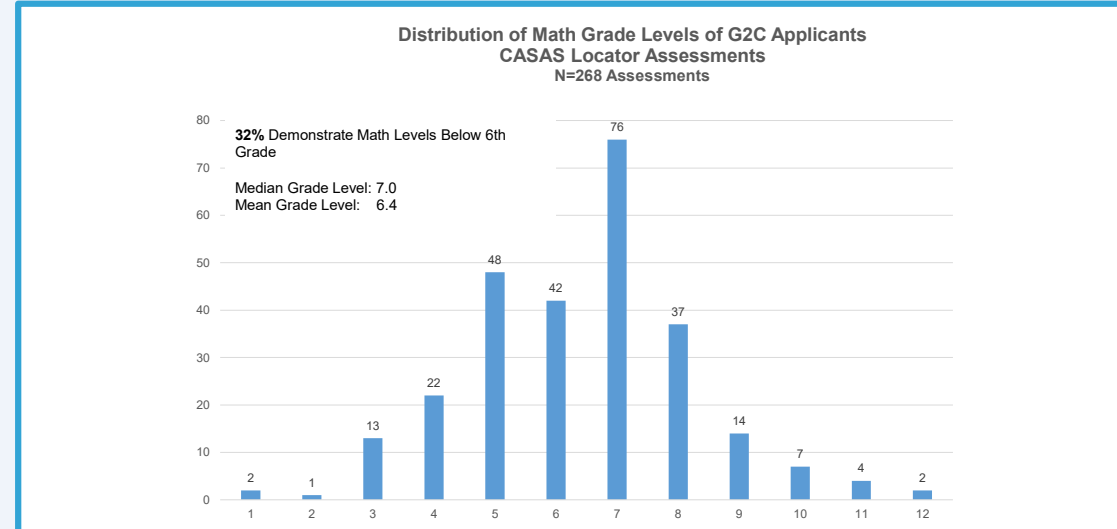
Comparing Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 participation, Cycle 1 had more than double the number of participants, which is likely due to the change in eligibility criteria and the rolling admissions process which was described above. A much higher proportion of Cycle 2 participants compared to Cycle 1 participants (52% versus 40%) completed the training program following the summer prep program; however, the majority (65%) had not yet found employment after the training program. None of these differences, however, were statistically significant.

The table below also illustrates the differences between Cycles 1 and 2 with regards to academic growth.

Table 8 Differences in Academic Growth between Cycles 1 and 2

	Cycle 1 Remediation	Cycle 2 Remediation
Average Academic Growth: Reading	+ 1.2 grade levels	+ 1.43 grade levels*
Median Growth: Reading	+ 1.4 grade levels	+ 2 grade levels*
Average Academic Growth: Math	+ 0.72 grade levels	+ 1.81 grade levels*
Median Growth: Math	+ 0.9 grade levels	+ 1 grade level*

G2C Summer Prep Class (SPC) Update Incoming Academic Proficiency of All Youth Tested



*For the CASAS exam used in Cycle 2, each grade level is represented by a band of scores. As such, calculations for the Cycle 2 average/median grade level growth were not based on student-specific point gains, but instead the number of grade levels a student improved (0, 1, or 2) by subject.

Academic growth analysis was conducted among only those students who had pre- and post-test data available (Cycle 1 n=33, Cycle 2 n=28). As seen in the table above, the summer prep program showed promise in improving participant’s reading and math scores. Yet, for Cycle 1, there were several limitations that should be noted when interpreting this data. Not every student who applied to G2C had pre- and post-testing data available and providers used different assessments to assess reading and math proficiency.¹

In Cycle 2, the average daily attendance among summer prep participants was 79%, with 90% completing a post-remediation CASAS test. Across the 7 weeks of remediation, there was a total of 165 hours of programming which included remediation, wellness, student-centered activities, and opportunities for individualized support. Among those participants who completed both a pre and post-test, 48% had improved to meet the requirement of their preferred training, and 33% made gains to be within one grade level of the required scores. In general, the program strived to create a positive program culture with strong routines in place and very few disciplinary issues. Comparing academic growth between cycles, there was a greater level of academic growth in both reading and math in Cycle 2 versus Cycle 1.

What was the experience of BridgeEdu in Cycle 1?

In-depth interviews conducted with three coordinators from Bridge Edu and five student participants after the first cycle of summer prep revealed that the remediation program needed to be much more than academics. The quote below highlights the high level of need that many of these students experienced, with several not being able to necessarily recognize their needs.

“It’s important to realize that for some of these kids, instability might be difficult to recognize. For example, if it’s ‘normal’ for them to live with grandma for two weeks and then go to the uncle for a month, they may not recognize that their situation is not ideal.”

Another challenge that instructors commonly faced was how to teach new concepts to students as well as creatively assess what students already knew. For example, they found that many students do not read test questions. Instructors had to get students to critically think about a problem, and then build their confidence to select the most appropriate response. Some instructors understood this and were successful, while others were not.

Despite these challenges, all coordinators saw growth among the students. One female student, for example, told the instructors that before BridgeEdu, she had not had a math teacher in over three years. Yet, she demonstrated the capacity to learn, and by the end of the program, she was demonstrating confidence in solving academic problems. This was the issue for so many of their youth participants – that while students have the capacity to learn, many do not realize it, nor do they have the tools for success. This can be changed by equipping them with the right

resources and teaching them in the right environment. Notably at the end of the program, students were asked what they learned, and many said that their confidence in learning increased. Very few, however, mentioned academic skills. Instead, as the comments below illustrate, they focused on life skills growth:

“I learned that not everyone is going to have the same perspective as me, and that’s okay.”

“I learned how to get along with people.”

“I learned how to present myself appropriately.”

Key Take-Aways about Summer Prep Program

- The summer prep program was established in the first Cycle of G2C after testing revealed that 40% of recruited youth were not meeting math and reading levels required by some training sites.
- The structure of the summer prep program changed between Cycle 1 and 2. In Cycle 1, BridgeEdu was the contracted organization; in Cycle 2, Elevation Education implemented the program. In Cycle 2, admissions was changed to ensure that all students would complete the full 7-week session at the same time.
- Nearly half (48%) of summer prep participants made gains to meet the requirements of their preferred training program and a third made gains within one grade level of the required scores. Additionally, slightly over half (52%) were able to complete the occupational training program following summer prep.

Occupational Training Programs

Since the 1930s, job training programs have been federally funded with the goal of connecting young people to work and school.¹⁰ Research has shown that those who participate in job training have a higher probability of being employed compared to those who have not. Additionally, at an individual level, there is a strong association between job training history and employment outcomes demonstrating that the more time is spent in training, the likelihood of being actively employed increases.¹¹ Given the current labor market dynamics of primarily hiring job candidates with experience, and the negative implications of disconnected youth, the need for young adults to gain skills and experience is increasingly important.¹¹ Previous workforce development initiatives that focus on industry sectors can benefit not only the job seekers of the community, but also the employers and local economies.¹²

By design, G2C’s goal was to create a pathway to employment through job training programs by providing occupational skills training, as well as job readiness and wraparound services. This aligns with evidence that shows that when initiatives focus on system-level changes, participants are more likely to have better employment outcomes than conventional job training programs.^{12,13}

Table 9 illustrates the training provider awardees for Cycles 1, 2 and 3, organized by provider and program track, the number of slots available, and the number of young people enrolled into slots.

Table 9. Enrollment by Provider and Program Track by Cycle

Training Provider and Program Track	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 3		
	Slots	Enrolled	Slots	Enrolled	Slots		Enrolled
					G2C	WIOA	
Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC)	50	45 (90%)	55	55 (100%)	37	0	37 (100%)
Medical Front Office		15		14			10
Medical Front Office + Phlebotomy		12		1			5
Phlebotomy only		2					
CNA/GNA/PCT				11			9
CNA/GNA		5		10			3

Table 9. Enrollment by Provider and Program Track by Cycle Continued

CNA only				10			
GNA only				1			1
PCT only				2			
Pharmacy Technician		11		6			9
Baltimore City Community College (BCCC)	30	17 (57%)	15	15 (100%)	12	0	12 (100%)
Cabling Installer		8					
Cyber Security/A+		9		7			
CNA/GNA				5			4
Pharmacy Technician				3			8
Bon Secours of Maryland (BSCW)	30	30 (100%)	30	30 (100%)	33	6	39 (100%)
CNA/GNA		30		30			39
BioTechnical Institute of Maryland (BTI)	18	15 (83%)	9	9 (100%)			
Lab Associates		15		9			
Maryland New Directions (MND)	22	12 (55%)	31	29 (94%)	28	8	35 (76%)
Maritime, Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics		12		17			26 + 7
Hospitality				12			2
Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF)	20	17 (85%)			10	0	6 (60%)
Construction		17					6
Urban Alliance (UA)	15	13 (87%)	15	13 (87%)	23	0	23 (100%)
Land Surveying		13		13			23
Civic Works			25	25 (100%)	13	4	17 (100%)
Construction				25			17
Year Up			19	19 (100%)			
Cyber Security				4			
Helpdesk/Desktop Support				15			
Code in the Schools					10	0	3 (30%)
IT							3
NPower					2	6	2 (25%)
IT							2
Catholic Charities					0	6	6 (100%)
IT							0
Automotive							2
Childcare							4
Humanim					0	6	0 (0%)
Administrative							
Intersection of Change					0	4	4 (100%)
Customer Service							4

Table 9. Enrollment by Provider and Program Track by Cycle Continued

Agriculture							0
KRA					0	6	0 (0%)
Construction							0
Life Bridge Health					0	6	6 (100%)
Patient Transport							6
Medical Records							0
NCIA					0	6	0 (0%)
HVAC							0
Unmanned Drone Piloting							0
Total	185	149 (81%)	199	195 (98%)	157	52	190 (91%)

Cycle 3 numbers are as of 10/01/21 and likely will change as cycle 3 is not yet complete. For NPower, 2 of the 2 G2C slots were filled and no WIOA slots were filled. For MND, 26 of 28 G2C slots were filled and 7 of 8 WIOA slots were filled.

Across cycles, there were five training provider sites that remained the same: Urban Alliance, BCCC, CCBC, Maryland New Directions, and Bon Secours Community Works. Additionally, three training provider sites were similar for two Cycles: JOTF for Cycles 1 and 3; BioTechnical Institute (BTI) for Cycles 1 and 2; and Civic Works/YouthBuild for Cycles 2 and 3, and for Cycle 3, new provider sites included Code in the Schools, NPower, Catholic Charities, Lifebridge Health, and Intersection of Change.

Table 10 below highlights the training provider sites by industry. Approximately half of all enrolled participants are in various health care tracks, which can include medical front office, pharmacy technician, phlebotomy, and CNA/GNA tracks. Construction, Cabling, and HVAC come next, which range from 17% of all enrolled participants in Cycle 1 to 12% in Cycle 3. While Biotechnology, Surveying, and Information Technology all range from 6 – 12% of enrollment every cycle, Logistics & Distribution had a notable increase in enrollment from 8% in cycle 1 to 17% in cycle 3.

Table 10. Enrollment by Training Sites and Job Industry

Industry	Number Enrolled		
	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Administrative & Customer Service			4 (2%) Humanim - 0 Intersection of Change - 4
Agriculture			4 (2%) Intersection of Change
Automotive			2 (1%) Catholic Charities
Childcare			4 (2%) Catholic Charities

Table 10. Enrollment by Training Sites and Job Industry Continued

Industry	Training Site	Enrollment	Completion	Employment
Construction, Cabling, & HVAC		25 (17%)	25 (13%)	23 (12%)
	JOTF – 17		Civic Works – 25	Civic Works – 17
	BCCC – 8			JOTF – 6
				KRA – 0
				NCIA – 0
Surveying	Urban Alliance	13 (9%)	13 (7%)	23 (12%)
Biotechnology	BTI	15 (10%)	9 (5%)	--
Healthcare		75 (50%)	93 (47%)	94 (49%)
	BSCW – 30		BSCW – 30	BSCW – 39
	CCBC – 45		CCBC – 55	CCBC – 37
			BCCC – 8	BCCC – 12
				Life Bridge Health – 6
Hospitality	--		12 (6%)	2 (1%)
			MND	MND
Information Technology		9 (6%)	26 (13%)	5 (3%)
	BCCC		BCCC – 7	Code in the Schools – 3
			Year Up – 19	NPower – 2
				Catholic Charities - 0
Logistics & Distribution	MND	12 (8%)	17 (9%)	33 (17%)
Total		149	195	190

Training program outcomes

To examine potential differences across training provider sites, three outcomes were examined: enrollment, completion, and job placement. Table 11 below illustrates the number and percentage of those who enrolled and completed a program. Chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relation between provider sites and program completion by cycle as well as across cycles (employment outcomes are described later in the Job Placement section). In Cycles 2 and 3, there are significant associations between training provider and program completion ($X^2=25.8, p<.05$; $X^2=31.0, p<.05$), suggesting there is varying levels of program completion across training providers within those two cycles. Additionally, significant differences were also observed among some individual provider sites by cycle. Specifically, there is a significant difference between program completion across program cycles for CCBC ($X^2=5.9, p=.05$), which may be driven by a lower proportion of students completing training in Cycle 3.

Table 11. Program Outcomes by Training Providers

Training Program	Cycle 1			Cycle 2			Cycle 3		
	Enrolled	Completed	Employed	Enrolled	Completed	Employed	Enrolled	Completed	Employed
BCCC	17 (57%)	11 (65%)	8 (47%)						
15 (100%)	7 (47%)	4 (27%)	12 (100%)	6 (50%)	3 (25%)				
JOTF	17 (85%)	16 (94%)	10 (59%)	-	-	-	6 (60%)	5 (83%)	2 (33%)
Urban Alliance	13 (87%)	9 (69%)	5 (38%)	13 (87%)	11 (85%)	7 (54%)	23 (100%)	22 (96%)	9 (39%)
Bon Secours	30 (100%)	23 (77%)	18 (60%)	30 (100%)	24 (80%)	19 (63%)	39 (100%)	25 (64%)	15 (38%)
BTI	15 (83%)	8 (53%)	4 (27%)	9 (100%)	6 (67%)	5 (56%)	-	-	-
Civic Works	-	-	-	25 (100%)	23 (92%)	12 (48%)	17 (100%)	17 (100%)	4 (24%)
Year Up	-	-	-	19 (100%)	8 (42%)	3 (16%)	-	-	-
MND	12 (55%)	11 (92%)	5 (42%)	29 (94%)	26 (90%)	17 (59%)	35 (76%)	26 (74%)	16 (46%)
CCBC*	45 (90%)	29 (64%)	18 (40%)	55 (100%)	37 (67%)	36 (65%)	37 (100%)	16 (43%)	7 (19%)
Catholic Charities	-	-	-	-	-	-	6 (100%)	3 (50%)	2 (33%)
Code in the Schools	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 (30%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Intersection of Change	-	-	-	-	-	-	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
LifeBridge Health	-	-	-	-	-	-	6 (100%)	3 (50%)	5 (83%)
NPower	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	149 (81%)	107 (72%)	68 (46%)	195 (98%)	142 (73%)*	103 (53%)*	190 (91%)	123 (65%)*	63 (33%)

* $p<.05$;

Note: Employed counts include all enrolled participants and proportions are based on those enrolled. Cycle 3 includes both G2C and WIOA participants where relevant

Participant characteristics

To examine whether the characteristics of the youth participants influenced program enrollment and completion, as well as post training employment, we also performed Chi-square tests of independence. Table 12 below presents program outcomes by various youth characteristics, including sex, whether they participated in a CTE track when in high school, whether they had a driver’s license, and whether they had children by each cycle. Notably, there were no significant differences in the proportion of youth who enrolled, completed, and were employed by any of the youth characteristics, nor were there by cycle.

Characteristic Category	Characteristics	Cycle 1			Cycle 2			Cycle 3		
		Category	Completed	Employed	Enrolled	Completed	Employed	Enrolled	Completed	Employed
Sex	Male	62 (42%)	49 (79%)	28 (45%)	88 (45%)	68 (77%)	42 (48%)	70 (37%)	56 (80%)	23 (33%)
	Female	85 (57%)	58 (68%)	39 (46%)	107 (55%)	74 (69%)	61 (57%)	116 (61%)	67 (58%)	40 (34%)
	Non-binary	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1%)	0	0
	Prefer not to say	1 (1%)	0	1 (100%)	0	0	0	2 (1%)	0	0

Characteristic Category	Characteristics	Category	Completed	Employed	Enrolled	Completed	Employed	Enrolled	Completed	Employed
Other	CTE track+	55 (37%)	38 (69%)	26 (47%)	27 (14%)	13 (48%)	7 (26%)	28 (15%)	19 (68%)	8 (29%)
	Driver's license+	26 (19%)	20 (77%)	13 (50%)	34 (23%)	26 (76%)	21 (62%)	25 (16%)	19 (76%)	9 (36%)
	Has Children+	4 (31%)	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	18 (10%)	17 (94%)	15 (83%)	14 (11%)	7 (50%)	3 (21%)

+ Data not available for all participants

What were the key topics and skills that youth participants learned from the training programs?

When youth participants were asked about what they learned from the training program, their responses can be grouped into three main areas: 1) topics and skills related to job seeking; 2) topics and skills related to the specific training area; and 3) life skills. Below we describe each of these groupings in more detail.

Topics and skills related to job seeking: Most youth participants who completed the program reported learning specific skills for the workforce, even for jobs that were not in their field of training.

“We were all talking about different ways to get a job and one of the teachers said to us that the most effective way to get a job is not to wait for it. To get what you want. So, he taught us the things to say; the types of things to wear. We had mock interview days when I would come in with multiple interview outfits and he would tell me what’s good and bad about all the parts of the outfit.” (female, completed program, job not in field)

A few participants also mentioned being taught about what to wear for a job interview, and how to search for a job. Several mentioned being frequently contacted about job fairs and specific job opportunities (both in and outside the training field). Notably, one participant who did not complete the program, reported that the instructors are still helping her get into the pharmacy tech field.

“Even though I wasn’t able to finish, they helped me apply for the pharmacy tech exam. She [the instructor] is also helping me with math and building my resume.” (female, did not complete program, job in field)

Topics and skills related to specific training area: Several participants, regardless of whether they completed the program, discussed learning topics and skills related to the specific training program. For instance, one female participant discussed that she learned about how to fill medicine inside the syringe and place it inside the IV bag. She also discussed the importance of counting pills.

“You’re not supposed to use your hands, you have to use a stick. It’s actually very hard when you actually do it. You wouldn’t think it was hard, but it’s actually really hard.” (female, did not complete program, job not in field)

Others discussed the skills needed to have a job in that field: *“basic things to know to be an electrician,” “plumbing, we put pipes in, practicing plumbing pipes,” “HVAC,” “we’re mostly learning about IT,” “basics in taking pulse and blood pressure,” “how to make bacteria, how to work with some type of chemicals, and all that.”* Related, one participant said that even if she does not have a job in the medical field, it was helpful learning medical terminology especially when she visits a health care provider.

Life skills: One participant shared an interesting perspective about how the program led her towards a career pathway that involved enrolling in a four-year degree college, that while not in the training field, would never have come her way had she not participated in G2C.

“I am a very big believer that everything happens for a reason....If I never would have done the program, I never would have gone to Towson. If I never did the program, I would not have an updated resume right now. If I never did the program, I would not have met the teachers I met. If I never did the program, I would not have my CPR certificate. If I would not have done the program, I would not have ever been involved in this directing thing [she’s in a Towson theatre program], which is very important to me – because it’s what I want to do in life. So, it’s like this program, although I didn’t get out of it what was intended for me, it connected me to so many things that it was so very much well worth it!” (female, completed program, job not in field).

THIS PROGRAM, ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T GET OUT OF IT WHAT WAS INTENDED FOR ME, IT CONNECTED ME TO SO MANY THINGS THAT IT WAS SO VERY MUCH WELL WORTH IT!

It is worth noting that an instructor from the training program introduced this participant to the theater program at Towson, as well as assisted her in enrolling. Finally, several participants felt that the program taught them how to better navigate the real world, including how to be safe, how to be on time, how to be more responsible, how to be more confident, and helped in their transition to adulthood.

What are the key components of the program?

Youth participants were also asked to discuss what they felt were the key components of the training programs. Overwhelmingly, participants mentioned that the quality of the instructors was one of the most important components.

“What made it outstanding – I’m going to literally just say – is the teachers. The teachers actually care and are willing to do anything to help you get a legit career.” (male, completed program, job not in field)

Several youth participants mentioned instructors who used “hands-on” methods to help them understand the material more clearly was especially important. For instance, a few mentioned that the program helped them re-learn math, with one respondent even stating, “I got really deep into math.” Another participant recalled how the teacher told her that she needed to score at least an 80 or above on every test. When she told the teacher that it was impossible for her to do so, the teacher started giving her tips about making flashcards. Since she did that, she received high 90s on every single test.

One of the most frequently heard attributes about the instructors, however, was how caring and dedicated they were.

“You had teachers that wanted to teach and wanted to be there every day. It was better than school to be there. I’m going to be honest with you. I learned more there than I learned in school.” (female, completed program, no job)

“They need to keep her for real. She related to us. Not even on an education level, but on a personal level. I didn’t really have a mother in my life. It’s kind of why I connected with her because felt like a mother figure. She told us some of her personal business, and she didn’t even have to do that. That’s how I approached her and related to her. She was open, and we was open with her.” (female, completed program, no job)

In addition to the instructors, a few respondents mentioned how valuable it was to receive texts and ‘check in’ calls by the training site coordinators as well as the G2C staff. In fact, one youth pointed out

that if any youth had not been in class, they would receive a call from the coordinator to ask them how they were doing, which demonstrated the caring nature of the staff.

Key Take-Aways about the Occupational Training Program

- There were no specific youth characteristics (male/female, have a CTE track, have a driver's license, or have children) that influenced whether a youth enrolled, completed, or found employment as a result of participating in G2C.
- There were no specific training providers with significantly higher proportions of enrolled participants, but some providers had a higher proportion of participants who completed the program or were employed post program, and for some providers, these differences varied by cycle.

Student Support in Training

Once a student is enrolled in a training program, wraparound supports are designed to help keep students enrolled, support their overall development, and cope with any challenges they may face as they transition into young adults.

Mental Health and Well-being:

In October 2018 (near the end of Cycle 1), G2C hired a Mental Health and Wellness counselor, a clinical social worker, to provide mental health and wellness supports to G2C students. In developing this role, the

counselor spent the first few months designing a strategy for how services would be best implemented within the context of G2C. She reached out to providers and key partners to identify the needs of the participants and the individual training sites and subsequently used that data to design the student support service strategy. Currently, the counselor provides a variety of supportive services, ranging from open discussions about specific topics related to mental health and wellness in adulthood, as well as individual sessions that include short-term counseling, coaching, and referrals to community resources. The counselor usually starts with initial site-based classroom or

small group presentations designed to introduce G2C participants to general information about mental health and wellness and the services available through the counselor. Although the services are utilized in different ways across occupational training sites, the overall goal is for every G2C student to be able to access voluntary mental health and wellbeing supports.

Common mental health and well-being needs discussed with the counselor included the following:

- Mental Health Assistance most related to symptoms consistent with anxiety and depression
- Unstable Housing Situations and difficulty locating affordable and safe housing
- Questions about how to utilize their medical insurance for physical or mental health treatment, to apply for insurance if they are uninsured, and locating medical providers they are comfortable with.
- Lack of interpersonal support – difficult relationships with people in the household

- Intimate partner violence
- Challenges in training programs (problem-solving challenges with staff, material, and schedules)
- Desire to connect with other young adults and recreational hobbies and opportunities in the city
- Developing healthy ways of coping with stress
- Financial challenges (e.g., not having enough money to purchase personal care items, haircut for a job interview, clothing items related to a job, pay cell phone bill, etc.)
- Challenges with breaking goals down into smaller pieces, managing time and creating plans of action
- Involvement in foster care, juvenile justice or managing child protective services involvement with their own children
- Parenting as an older teen/young adult

Youth Advisors:

In addition to providing mental health and well-being support to G2C participants, the counselor developed a small group of youth advisors, who have remained engaged as alumni of G2C and helped to inform young-adult friendly ways of contributing and incorporating their expertise into the G2C initiative. The youth advisors have participated in panel presentations and roundtables; joined local committees; assisted in hiring G2C open staff positions; presented to philanthropic, educational, and workforce settings; provided input on G2C paperwork and surveys; reviewed proposals for organizations seeking funding; and developed new professional connections relevant to their career trajectories.

COVID-19 Supports:

During Cycle 3, when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, the counselor worked collaboratively with G2C staff to create a funding mechanism for supporting young adults' overall mental health and wellbeing. Funds were used to support a 6-month Virtual Life Masterclass in collaboration with the Black Mental Health Alliance which provided financial payments to nearly 200 G2C participants and alumni and helped to create COVID Kits with PPE and other supplies that were distributed to training providers to give to their G2C participants. Additionally, the counselor developed and updated a resource list geared to young adults and families throughout the pandemic.

Mentorship:

The counselor also supervised two Master of Social Work (MSW) Interns from the University of Maryland Baltimore, which increased the capacity of the counselor to meet with groups of students and complete follow-ups with students needing individual supports. Both interns also helped to create in-person and virtual spaces for G2C participants to talk openly about topics related to mental health and wellness in developmentally and culturally affirming ways.

Provider Support

The counselor also provides ongoing collaboration and consultation with occupational training providers to inform their work with young adults from a positive youth development perspective. On a monthly basis, the counselor meets with providers as a group, as well as individually at sites. Training providers contact the counselor for a range of requests, which may include assistance with identifying areas of need or communicating about strategies to improve success, or assistance with locating community



resources for participants. Working to meet the individual needs of different training sites with various support services, the counselor has individualized the activities to meet the needs of different sites. For example, at one large training provider site, the counselor and staff worked to host a half-day Mental Health and Wellness Fair. For others, the counselor identified community-based resources and speakers or served in the role of guest speaker or presenter for students beyond G2C.

Other Support Services by Training Providers:

In addition to the support services provided by the mental health and well-being counselor, providers offer a range of other services to help young participants in the training. For example, one training provider at BCCC mentioned that they have hired a ‘success coach’ to help students stay engaged and prepared for job placement. Specific services offered by the success coach include resume building and interview preparation, among other things. Additionally, at Maryland New Directions, providers said they implement career exploration workshops to help students with job readiness. Other types of wrap-around services included offering transportation supports (usually in the form of bus tokens), legal services to those who were involved in the juvenile justice system, as well assistance in paying child support and other fines and fees. The two lead services providers, Maryland Legal Aid and Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS) serve the training sites, and not just the G2C youth. Maryland Legal Aid is partnered with BCCC, CCBC, MND, and UA. MVLS is partnered with BSCW, BTI, and JOTF. Several providers also mentioned the importance of engaging with family members to provide additional motivation and support to their youth participants. At JOTF, they also provide financial case management and assistance with vehicle purchasing. Two providers also mentioned the importance of providing snacks and referrals for food assistance, while others mentioned providing professional clothing. Finally, case management was a service also mentioned by most training providers. The way that this is operationalized, however, varies by site. In some sites, each student is assigned to a case manager, in others, students are referred as needed.

Table 13 below displays the number and percentages of youth participants who engaged in behavioral health group meetings, one-on-one interactions, and legal services by program outcome and cycle. While no significant differences were observed in program outcomes or between cycles, notable, nearly a third of students (29%) have utilized one-on-one counseling interactions for both Cycles 2 and 3.

Table 13. Participation in Key Wrap-Around Services by Program Outcome and Cycle

	Cycle 1			Cycle 2			Cycle 3			Unknown Cycle
	Enrolled (n=149)	Completed (n=109)	Employed (n=69)	Enrolled (n=197)	Completed (n=143)	Employed (n=102)	Enrolled (n=187)	Completed (n=90)	Employed (n=43)	
Behavioral Health (Group Meetings) *	30 (20%)	28 (26%)	15 (22%)	51 (26%)	40 (28%)	31 (30%)	40 (21%)	17 (19%)	5 (12%)	
Interactions via Spruce**	5 (3%)			58 (29%)			54 (29%)			60
Legal Services*^	55 (37%)	28 (26%)	17 (25%)	13 (7%)	9 (6%)	6 (6%)	36 (19%)	17 (19%)	5 (12%)	

* Only includes workshop events inputted by providers

** Includes individual participants by Cycle that had interactions with counseling team on Spruce. Some one-on-one meetings were conducted in person, thus were not tracked in Spruce. Additionally, as this data is not connected to ETO due to privacy reasons, only total counts per Cycle are provided. A total of 177 participants had one-on-ones within Spruce.

^Not all participants were offered Legal Services during their job training program.

Perceptions from Youth Participants

Findings from the in-depth interviews among youth provided another perspective about how these wrap-around services were received. Several youth participants, for example, mentioned bus tokens, food, finances (such as helping them with credit), driver’s licenses and other ID materials, stipends (\$25 on Mondays and \$25 on Wednesdays), and counseling as being key to their engagement in the programs. The quotes below are illustrative of this sentiment.

“I don’t want to say names, but there is a social worker who comes on Fridays and she’s very helpful. She has referred me to a complete wellness, which is kind of, not therapy session, but they have different stuff. She’ll try to help with anything. Like if you’re having issues with housing, they can help with that.” (focus group participant, still in program, no job)

“Y’all providing the lower-class people with things we need to succeed. Like most of us don’t have no cars. So, went on the bus every day. But y’all gave us bus tokens. I had to scrape up money to get it for my father, for my other family members, but with this program, I didn’t have to. So, y’all provided us with good incentives.” (female, completed program, no job)

In some cases, however, these types of free services were not enough to overcome personal barriers. For example, one youth participant dropped out because although she was receiving free bus tokens, the busses were constantly late, and she ended up missing several classes. Childcare was another issue that did not seem to get addressed in some of the training programs.

Key Take-Aways for Student Support in Training:

- A large proportion of G2C students have utilized wrap-around services, especially mental health and wellness services as well as legal aid.
- Consistent communication throughout the training program is key for helping students complete the program.
- Nearly a third (29%) of youth participants have utilized one-on-one counseling sessions for both Cycles 2 and 3;
- No significant differences were observed in program outcomes among those who engaged in behavioral health or legal aid services.

Job Placement

To examine the extent to which the G2C model is helping young people find jobs, Table 14 below illustrates the number and percentage of young people who completed a training program, secured employment, and among those employed, the proportion who found employment within the training field, by cycle. Chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relation between provider sites and employment by cycle as well as across cycles. In Cycle 2, there are significant associations between training provider and employment (X²=16.3, p<.05), suggesting there is varying levels of participant employment by training provider. Additionally, there are significant differences among some individual provider sites by participant employment across program cycles. Specifically, there is a significant difference between youth employment across program cycles for CCBC (X²=19.3, p=.05), which may be driven by a lower proportion of students completing training in Cycle 3 and for Bon Secours (X²=6.3, p=.05), which had a higher proportion of youth employed after during Cycle 2 compared to Cycles 1 and 3.

Table 14. Percentage of Youth Completers with Employment Across Cycles

	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 3	
	Completed	Employed	Completed	Employed	Completed	Employed
BCCC	11 (65%)	7 (64%)	7 (47%)	4 (57%)	6 (50%)	3 (50%)
A+	7	4	5	2	--	--
Cabling Installer	4	3	--	--	--	--
CNA/GNA	--	--	1	1	3	2
Pharm Tec	--	--	1	1	3	1
JOTF	16 (94%)	10 (63%)	--	--	5 (83%)	2 (40%)
Urban Alliance	9 (69%)	5 (56%)	11 (85%)	7 (64%)	22 (96%)	9 (41%)
Bon Secours	23 (77%)	18 (78%)	24 (80%)	19 (79%)	25 (64%)	14 (56%)
BTI	8 (53%)	4 (50%)	6 (67%)	5 (83%)	--	--
Civic Works	--	--	23 (92%)	12 (52%)	17 (100%)	4 (24%)
Year Up	--	--	8 (42%)	3 (38%)	--	--
Cyber Security	--	--	2	1	--	--
Helpdesk	--	--	6	2	--	--
MND	11 (92%)	5 (45%)	26 (90%)	16 (62%)	26 (74%)	15 (58%)
Hospitality	--	--	12	7	1	0
Maritime +	11	5	14	9	25	15
CCBC	29 (64%)	15 (52%)	37 (67%)	32 (86%)	16 (43%)	5 (31%)
CNA/GNA/PCT	--	--	4	4	5	2
CNA/GNA	2	2	8	7	2	0
CNA	--	--	10	10	--	--
PCT	--	--	2	2	--	--
MFO	9	5	10	7	9	3
MFO + Phleb	9	4	0	0	0	0
Pharm tech	9	4	3	2	0	0
Phleb only	0	0	--	--	--	--
Catholic Charities	--	--	--	--	3 (50%)	2 (67%)
Code in the Schools	--	--	--	--	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Intersection of Change	--	--	--	--	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Life Bridge Health	--	--	--	--	3 (50%)	3 (100%)
NPower	--	--	--	--	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	149 (81%)	64 (43%)	142 (73%)	97 (68%)	123 (65%)	57 (47%)

Although Cycle 3 data is still being collected on job placement, the table above confirms that a substantial proportion of youth who completed the occupational training programs have found employment (43% for Cycle 1 and 68% for Cycle 2). This does not include young people who have decided to enroll in higher education or those who have found jobs by utilizing other channels outside of G2C.

To get a sense of how providers prepare youth for job placements, in-depth interviews with training providers revealed there were a variety of different strategies in play. For example, staff at BCCC reported that before they permanently place students in a job, they implement a trial run with the employer, much like an internship, to ensure that employers and students are adequately matched. Meanwhile, staff at CCBC reported that they bring employers to the classroom and work with career services. After students perform their clinical rotations, CCBC staff discuss student performance with their clinic supervisors. Frequently-heard feedback – across the sites – was that students need to improve their soft skills, such as time management and workplace behavior. Finally, at MD New Directions, providers said that they actively communicate with employers to inform them when their training programs are taking place and ending, and ensure they are interested in hiring G2C students before they focus on job placements.

Do youth feel the program adequately prepared them for a future career?

Another way of assessing job placement and readiness was to ask youth participants about how they felt

FINDINGS REVEALED THAT MOST YOUTH PARTICIPANTS BELIEVED THAT G2C WAS A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE THAT PREPARED THEM FOR THEIR NEXT STAGE OF LIFE.

G2C prepared them for a future career. Findings revealed that most youth participants believed that G2C was a wonderful experience that prepared them for their next stage of life. From the youth interviews, several pointed out that the staff were dedicated to making sure they had everything they needed -- from writing letters of recommendations to ensuring they were prepared for a job interview. For some, the program gave them an opportunity to explore a career path never would have been thought of on their own.

“I learned medical terminology and medical front office together in one program. It’s hard, but that’s how you figure out if this field is for you. You have to learn all these terms and steps on how to do it, but that’s how you know.” (female, completed program, no job)

“Yeah, it helped me get into the job that I enjoy waking up and going to every day.” (male, completed program, job in field)

Similarly, the training program helped a few young people confirm that the field was a good fit for their future trajectory, which sometimes meant getting further education.

“I think it prepared me for the next steps. I was ready to go into the medical field, but I didn’t know if I wanted to go right into school or not. The program helped me figure out that I really do want to be in the medical field, and so now, I want to go back to school and I’ll be certified, so that will really help.” (female, completed program, job not in field)

Key Take-Aways for Job Placement:

- In Cycle 1 and 2, 43% and 68% of those who completed the program found employment, respectively
- Several providers described strategies for helping participants obtain employment, which included implementing internships with employers, inviting employers to the training site to meet the participants, and communicate with employers about their programs and when the training is complete.
- Majority of youth who completed the program felt the training had adequately prepared them for their jobs

Professional Development for Training Providers

As part of the G2C program, all training providers were strongly encouraged to attend monthly meetings that incorporated training in key areas related to working with young adults in workforce training programs. The meetings and trainings were facilitated by the G2C Core Team, with the training portion of the meeting often led by the G2C counselor sometimes in collaboration with other community-based organizations or experts. In addition to monthly meetings, there were several day-long or multiple-day trainings conducted by external consultants, specifically related to Racial, Equity, and Inclusion and Positive Youth Development. Providers are invited to participate in professional development trainings to assist them in their interactions with their youth participants. The table below highlights G2C’s and external organizations’ trainings to the providers.

G2C Trainings	Trainings by External Organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing Supportive Mental Health and Wellness Services (offered multiple times) • Forming Strong Relationships with Young Adults Participants: Catalysts for Success in Career Preparation, Employment, and Beyond) • Approaching Challenging Behaviors in Young Adult Friendly Ways: Strategies for Career Preparation Providers • Supporting G2C Youth: Identifying Needs, Accessing Supports, and Paving Pathways to Success (about Mental Health and resource needs providers commonly see) • Positive Communication and Continuous Feedback in Career Preparation: Helping Young Adults Build Skills and Become Successful Employees • Encouraging Growth and Success through Continuous Feedback: The Role of Training Programs in Helping Young Adults Build Skills Toward Successful Employment • Mental Health Month: Resources and Self-Care for Providers • Domestic Violence Awareness Month: Increasing Provider Awareness and Knowledge of Local and National Resources of Providers about intimate partner violence and local and national resources available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Youth Development: • Engaging with Young Adults: Digital and Social Media Presence • Growth Mindset with Elevation Educational Inc. • Covid-19: Key Facts and Community Messaging: University of Maryland School of Medicine • Creating Safer Spaces for LGBTQ Youth: Planned Parenthood Maryland • Digital Equity: Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition • Financial Empowerment Center: MOED • Mental Health Awareness and Support for Young Adults: Black Mental Health Alliance • Race, Equity and Inclusion

Impact of COVID

The G2C program has historically been an in-person, hands-on training program. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, program facilitation and protocol was abruptly changed to accommodate the safety measures needed to keep students and staff safe. CCBC, BCCC, JOTF, and Civic Works still held some of their hands-on training in person, while BCSW, Code in the Schools, NPower, and Urban Alliance all transitioned to 100% remote learning environments. Interviews with providers about the impact of COVID indicated that their program experienced several unanticipated issues regarding the following areas: technology and internet access, the remote learning environment, housing environment, and training. Below, each is described in more detail.

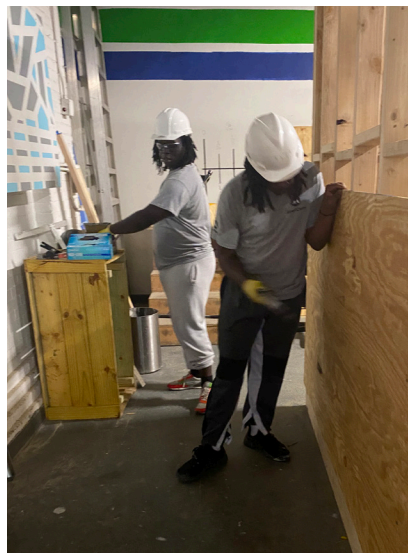
Technology:

- 1) Lack of access to computers: Many G2C students across nearly every training program experienced challenges of broken or faulty computers/laptops, or no computers/laptops at all. Several providers also found out that even though students confirmed they had a computer and internet access, they later found out that they were only using their phones, which was not a sufficient substitute. Ultimately, computer/laptop access is necessary to remotely participate in G2C training. One staff member from BCCC summed up some of these common issues:

“But, you know, ... the big thing is students’ level of equipment access and access to reliable internet. It’s really been an eye opener for me. You know, we always ask the question, ...Do you have access to, you know, a laptop and internet. Yes. And then three weeks in the class, we find out they’re using the app that canvases our learning management system and ... we find out they’re using the app to try to submit assignments and it’s not working. So, you know, we’ve been able to kind of identify those students [and] tell them, hey wait a minute, you know, we’re going to work with you once you get a computer.”

Providers also mentioned that access to computers needs to be consistent and reliable throughout the duration of training. It is not possible for a participant to “restart” the program online if they missed portions of their training from being offline because of their inability to remain in the remote environment. Providing laptops to participants was a strategy deployed by some occupational training programs to curb student drop-out. For example, at MD New Directions, one staff member mentioned the provision of laptops as a ‘pilot’ to see whether that would improve success:

“One of the challenges that we saw was that technology, you know, the technology divide. And so having limited or no access to the tools that you need to be able to operate in a virtual world. So those are some of the things that we’ve seen some of the challenges and at New Directions, we’ve purchased some laptops and we’re doing a trial run with some of our clients and if all goes well, then we’ll be purchasing even more laptops to help people be able to apply online and things like that.”



- 2) Learning curve adjusting to new software: Understanding and adjusting to the various software involved with the remote learning environment was challenging for both G2C staff and participants. Before the pandemic, many had little to no reason to be regular users of programs such as Zoom or Google Hangouts. The abrupt transition to their use was uneasy for those unfamiliar with or were infrequent users of computers/laptops and software to quickly adopt their use. This learning curve for adjusting to the technology particularly highlighted the shortcomings of the staff and program’s ability to function online and incorporate modern technologies into their program. A quote from a provider at CCBC illustrates this:

“Just transitioning to that [virtual environment] and maintaining organization was a struggle. You know, it was a, it was a significant struggle that required all of us. Our rescue crew team [directors and instructors from the program] banded together and thought about, you know, what we’re doing and how we’re doing it.”

- 3) Lack of Internet Access: A critical barrier to student participation in the G2C’s remote environment is internet access. Without consistent and quality internet access, it is nearly impossible to remain in the modified G2C program during this pandemic. Relying on WI-FI hotspots from cellular phones has not proven to be a viable alternative to a true internet connection as well. In fact, one of the key reasons why students have had to drop out was because of the lack of internet access. The quote from a provider from BCCC summarizes this well:

“What happens when their internet gets cut off two thirds of the way through the class? They were in person classes. And then where we started them online -- what happens when a student doesn’t have the ability to restart online? What happens to the two thirds of the class they completed and how do we get them across the finish line?”

Remote Learning Environment:

- 1) Learning from home: Adjusting to the remote learning environment has been an unfavorable process for those who need interpersonal interactions and a physical environment to thrive. Working from home takes place in the absence of peers, instructors, and the hands-on components of programming. For this reason, there has been a disconnect between such students and their G2C training. G2C instructors have noted students’ decline and/or lack of engagement with virtual programming, which is not only due to the remote learning environment, but also likely from other challenges encountered from the pandemic. Though select instructors have been able to increase student engagement via innovative practices, for the most part, students being “present” while working from home has been a regular issue.

“There was a period of weeks where I would text message all the students every day and an hour before class to remind them that we are having class today.” (training provider)

Social isolation has been another hardship of working from home. Under normal circumstances, one could work remotely and still move about, interacting with friends and family after work hours. However, during the pandemic and its restrictions on businesses, gatherings, and general activities, logging off from work or school does not lead to increased opportunities to be with and engage with friends and family outside of the home. Social isolation has had a negative impact on both staff and students alike.

“It’s kind of hard not be seeing a person in person. And not able to, you know, find a quiet place to talk on the internet or listen or whatever ... it’s hard to me. It’s hard because I’m not accustomed to working from home.” (training provider)

Housing Environment:

- 1) Home life exacerbated by COVID: COVID-19 has exacerbated several issues that G2C students commonly experience. Prior to COVID-19, attending G2C training was an opportunity for these students to be regularly outside their home environments. As a result of the lockdowns associated with COVID, students were now participating in the occupational skills training program from their homes, which varied in stability. Some students lived in temporary housing or with friends and relatives. To avoid invading their hosts’ privacy or being a poor house guest, or expose their true location, students in transient situations often keep their webcams off to attend remote training. Non-use of webcams was also common among students who did not want others to see their surroundings.

“The students... their environmental factors were exacerbated as a result of it now, like we have a person in our cohort right now who is essentially homeless and this person is regularly couch surfing. Each class is just, you know, it’s a misnomer for this individual because they don’t know where they’re going to be tomorrow, sometimes in a car. Sometimes it’s in a house, you know...There are other students who have crowded households...and it’s, you know, the authority says I can’t use the living room or the dining room, I can only, you know, I’m only restricted to my bedroom.”

Training:

1) *Modifying training protocols:* Many sites experienced significant struggles with transitioning to remote training and implementing changes to programming. While all sites eventually transitioned successfully to an online platform, ease of transition varied by site.

In the modified online G2C programming, not all components of the standard training were retainable. Due to their hands-on nature, there were classes that had to be cancelled since they are not possible remotely. Classes with major physical components such as plumbing and phlebotomy, were integrated online with difficulty. Such classes fell into a form of “limbo” lecturing as the training could not progress from the theoretical instructions to physical applications. To counteract the decline in program quality and/or ability, some sites offered additional academic support through online platforms (e.g. Blackboard) that were not typically available. These classes were intended to maintain student engagement and boost their morale.

2) *Uncertainty of remote impact:* Offering G2C in a remote capacity is a wholly unprecedented situation. G2C staff expressed concern over uncertainty of the impact the remote training will have on the students and the future of the program. Despite the modifications, it is uncertain at this time how the format changes will truly impact the students. They are receiving training that was quickly adjusted to fit the times, under conditions atypical to their standard learning environment. It will be a matter of time to determine how effective training sites were in their ability to successfully train students in the virtual environment to secure future employment.



“There’s always going to be, you know, some skill loss that happens you know when you have a break, but you know, it’s almost like I don’t want them to feel the gap, you know, okay, they’re not coming to class regularly. But let’s keep them engaged so that you know once you get the green light were able to move forward.” (Staff member from occupational skills training site)

Key Takeaways from Impact of COVID-19

- The COVID pandemic caused major disruptions in every G2C training program;
- Key challenges for students included the lack of access to computers and the Internet and finding safe and quiet learning environments within the home; training providers also had difficulty learning new software programs and how best to implement their programs to an online platform;
- While the data on Cycle 3 participants are still being collected, the majority of youth who enrolled in a training program were able to complete it (65%), which is just slightly lower from the previous cycles.

Systems Alignment, Future Scalability and Sustainability

The need for systems alignment

Prior to G2C, all individuals interviewed for the systems level interviews agreed that there was essentially little connection between the education and workforce systems and that each operated in its own silo. Below are illustrative quotes to illustrate this perceived need:

“School system’s view was that their job ended when the child graduated.”

“Generally, it [systems alignment] meant getting the workforce system to understand that they played a role in supporting this [youth] population.”

Perceived goal of G2C

A key aspect of systems alignment is to ensure that all partners agree on the primary goals of a project; therefore, participants were all asked about their perceptions of the main goals of G2C. Overwhelmingly, participants were consistent in reporting that the main purpose of G2C is to connect current and recent graduates to career training programs that lead to entry level job opportunities with family sustaining wages. Another goal that was emerging was to address the ‘college or bust’ mindset that seemed to be dominant in the Baltimore City Public School System. Before G2C, participants described that the main emphasis in schools was to prepare students for college.

“If you weren’t going to a 4-year college, there was no preparation or thinking about what your life would become and what kinds of transitions you needed to plan before you graduated.”

Part of the challenge is that schools are not accountable for students after they graduate, and therefore do not have any incentive for preparing students for other types of post-high school options. If G2C is to be successful and sustainable, however, several participants mentioned that changing this mindset in the school system must be another important goal and metric for success.

Key partners and roles

When participants were asked who they perceived were the main partners involved in G2C, all mentioned Baltimore City Schools, Baltimore’s Promise, and MOED. In addition, other partners identified included the business community (n=2); the training providers (n=2); funders (n=1), young people themselves (n=3); legal and behavioral health systems (n=2), and community colleges (n=1).

Participants perceived that the main role of Baltimore’s Promise was to fundraise and oversee the RFP process, while MOED was primarily tasked with overseeing the training providers and sites. Baltimore City Public Schools’ main role was to assist with G2C recruitment. However, several participants pointed out that the ability of a school to be successful with recruitment was dependent on the principals and guidance counselors. At the same time, since G2C’s implementation, the two school departments most aligned with the goals of G2C, the College Readiness Office and the Career and Technology Department, have both greatly evolved. For example, as a sign that the mindset of ‘college or bust’ may be changing, the College Readiness Office has shifted to a ‘post-secondary advising model’ and has built G2C into that model. Similarly, the Career and Technology Department, which was greatly understaffed before G2C, has now increased in size and capacity. These changes may help with increasing awareness and recruitment into G2C in the Baltimore City Public Schools system.

Key challenges with systems alignment

While there have been several accomplishments towards systems alignment, participants have also described several challenges. The most frequently cited issues are described below:

1) *Data sharing*: One of the biggest barriers mentioned across interviews for systems alignment was data sharing. Participants cited several factors at play, including: 1) legal issues, which include privacy concerns and data sharing agreements; 2) data framing: each system has its own set of terms, “we might be talking about the same kind of information, but how it is framed can make it seem different”; 3) matching the data across systems: “there is data from the City schools, the recruitment side, ETO, and the MOED programming side, and my god, it’s a nightmare”; 4) data restrictions in who can access the data: “I think it would be great to share our data with the training providers because that would give them a better understanding of where the students are”; and 5) lack of a centralized system: “If I’m talking with a provider about a student, a lot of it is through emails and phone calls.. It could save a lot of work if there was a centralized system... there’s the assumption that providers are all tracking everything, but a lot of that could be improved.”

2) *Numeracy and literacy issues*: In many ways, G2C has placed numeracy and literacy issues at the forefront, as illustrated in the quote below

“If it were not for G2C, I would not have known that 45% of our high school students are reading at fourth grade and below.”

While G2C targets high school graduates, the program has highlighted a larger systemic issue within the Baltimore City Public Schools system, and that is that many are graduating without being able to meet basic numeracy and literacy levels required for occupational training programs. These numeracy and literacy issues, however, start to emerge well before students graduate high school. One interviewee described it well:

“We soon realized the severity of it and how our failures to educate our young people has real life implications. It was a real eye opener when I looked at some data from a cohort of kids that started kindergarten and followed them to the end of third grade. The stat that sticks out the most is that 59% of Black boys came into kindergarten ready to learn, and that was the most prepared group. But by the end of third grade, when they took that PARC test, only 10% of that group [of Black boys] was prepared to learn.”

Several participants felt that if G2C is going to be sustainable, not only does the summer prep program need to be a permanent component to help students reach the minimum level of math and reading skills to enroll in an occupational training program, but that options for remediation occur earlier and year-round.

3) *Engagement with employers*: Another challenge mentioned by three interviewees was that while G2C was never responsible for building employer partnerships with providers, as that was up to the provider, there was a sense that more could be done to strengthen the relationship with industry partners.

“Not only in preparing the talent but connecting students to that talent and creating visible pathways for them to see these opportunities because you will hear from them [employers] that the jobs are there.”

One interviewee suggested this might be accomplished by bringing employers to the school and doing this earlier than 12th grade. Another interviewee mentioned that there have been a few times when employers have reached out to ask how they can get young people involved in their business, but because this is not normally the function of G2C, it becomes a complex question to address.

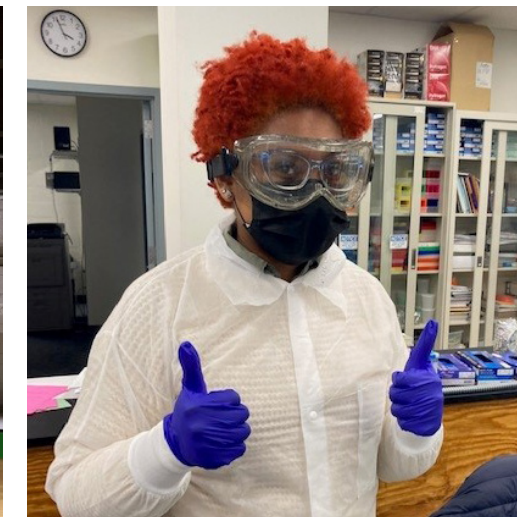
Markers of Success

Participants in the systems interviews were also asked about what they perceive to be markers and metrics of success for G2C – both now and for the future. Below are examples of current markers of G2C success:

- *Establishment of youth advisory panel*: “Having a youth advisory panel is huge...if we are not tailoring this to provide resources for young people to be successful – as they define success – then we are not doing our jobs.”
- *Employers are contacting G2C*: “More employers are wanting to become partners and expand who they’ve been working with.”
- *G2C is now listed as a post-secondary option on the student plan*: This was mentioned by several participants who also commented on the shift from a College Readiness model to a Post-Secondary Advising model, which has now built G2C in that model.
- *Expansion of Career and Technology Department*, which includes the hiring of more staff to build capacity

Additionally, below are markers mentioned for G2C’s success in the future:

- *Increased awareness*: “That more people know about the program... it’s not just about telling the small percentage of young people and their families about the program. It’s something that is built into the fiber.”
- *Enrollment changes observed in community colleges*: “Enrollment in community colleges for certificate and career programs would shift from the transfer programs”
- *Cycle 1 participants are still employed*
- *Funding is secured*: “G2C becomes self-sustaining “
- “G2C becomes a national model”



Scalability and Sustainability of G2C

To address the facilitators and barriers for the future scalability and sustainability of G2C, participants were asked about what it would take to make G2C a permanent and fixed entity in Baltimore. A key theme that was discussed among several individuals was funding, particularly permanent funding. Two individuals discussed the need for G2C not to be dependent on only foundation support. In fact, many participants mentioned the need to investigate federal funds to support the work of G2C. The quote below illustrates this sentiment:

“There is three and a half billion dollars spent in Baltimore on young people from birth to age 20 years; about 400 + million of that is from the City of Baltimore proper. The majority of those dollars are federal dollars coming from three systems: education; human services (which includes foster care), and health (which includes Medicaid). There are resources that are there – they are just not focused on this population and so until we have to actively engage philanthropy, we have to take advantage of the partnerships and the system leaders.”

At the same time, there were a few individuals who noted that federal funds were often too restrictive. Particularly during the pandemic, many youth participants were experiencing food insecurity, issues with housing, and many did not have laptops to access the training materials. Funding that could help pay for those expenses is also necessary for continued sustainability. As one participant said, *“it’s like we who are on the ground doing the direct work – we should be able to advance some wish list ideas.”*

In addition to funding, participants offered several other recommendations to ensure G2C’s future success:

- 1) Processes for systems alignment need to start early: Several participants mentioned that the alignment between the workforce and education sectors needs to happen earlier than the 12th grade. Part of this entails getting young people to think more about the skills they need for future careers, which includes both academic and life skills. *“...how can we bring the providers into the school day or into a young person’s high school journey earlier? The reading levels, the math levels – we need to prepare for it ahead of time and not just at graduation.”*
- 2) Youth participants need a living wage to participate: A few participants thought that if G2C was going to be a permanent entity, participants need a living wage. *“It could be integrated into a cohesive package of support while we invest in their skills.”*
- 3) Hire a permanent data support position: Related to the numerous data issues, two participants mentioned there was a need to hire a permanently staffed position who is primarily responsible for data management, support, and analysis.
- 4) Engage with alumni: A few participants mentioned that there should be clearer avenues for engaging with alumni of G2C. Some suggested that they could be better engaged with recruitment (sharing their experiences), while one thought that there could be additional training for them to continue to ‘climb ladders’ and obtain additional certification or specialized training.
- 5) Create a Theory of Change: One participant said that if G2C was indeed going to be a permanent entity, there needed to be a clear theory of change that would highlight the structure of G2C, the roles and responsibilities of each person and organization involved, and how the program fits into the broader ecosystem of workforce development. Somewhat related, another participant mentioned the need to hire a chief program officer who has workforce development experience and would be able to “manage the bigger picture as opposed to being bogged down with the details of data.”
- 6) Cultivate more connections with employers: Several participants said that employers are only aware of G2C if they are a partner of a training provider site. However, two participants felt that to create visible career pathways for students, G2C needs to cultivate relationships with industry partners rather than only relying on the providers for employer connections.

Key Take-Aways of Systems Alignment and Scalability

- There have been a number of systems alignment achievements, including the establishment of a youth advisory panel, an increased awareness of G2C among some employers, a shift in the Baltimore City Public Schools from a College Readiness Department into a post-secondary advising model, which includes G2C as an option, and finally the expansion of the Career and Technology Department in the school system.
- Despite these achievements, several challenges were also noted including data sharing across systems, numeracy and literacy issues that were being addressed too late, and the need to strengthen the relationships with employers.
- To make G2C a fixed entity, additional sources of funding need to be established that would enable all training programs to provide participants with a living wage, the hiring of a permanent data support position, increased engagement among alumni a employers and to introduce workforce development to students at an earlier age.

DISCUSSION

This report describes the implementation and early impacts of the G2C program. Findings show that G2C is a feasible program that has great potential for becoming a permanent entity for connecting young people to employment and education. Prior to G2C, qualitative data revealed that workforce and school systems had very little contact with each other, as the prevailing mindset of Baltimore City Public Schools was a ‘college or bust’ perspective, with very little incentive in guiding students toward workforce development. Additionally, the workforce sector did not yet have the perspective that they should be involved in supporting the development of young people. However, after three years of implementation, the G2C model has demonstrated its ability to adapt as challenges unfold and has achieved several key milestones of success, described in the sections that follow.

G2C Milestones of Success

1) *Even though COVID had an enormous impact, 81% (in Cycle 1) to 91% (in Cycle 3) of slots were filled.* This shows that not only has recruitment efforts improved from Cycle 1, but there is also sufficient demand for the program. Yet, recruitment events are only one aspect of what it takes to get interested young people enrolled in a training program. Successful recruitment requires “high-touch” case management and skills to get a student who is interested in the program to be tested, referred to a training program, and then actually be present on the first day of class. A trusted adult is needed to communicate continuously, and G2C’s Participant Support Coordinator has been key in this effort.

2) *G2C has put literacy and numeracy issues at the forefront.* Academic testing that was required for many of the training programs revealed that among tested G2C applicants, 51% demonstrated reading levels below the required 8th grade level, and 32% demonstrated math levels below the required 6th grade level. While this was a challenge, G2C staff and partners immediately responded and added a summer prep program to boost applicant scores. Indeed, other research has shown

that integrating basic skills training with post-secondary occupational instruction is a promising approach as it allows for the academic content to be contextualized within occupational content, which has shown to motivate learning.⁸ Results confirm this, as 48% made gains to meet the requirements of their preferred training program, and 33% made gains within one grade level of the required score. Additionally, systems-level interviews revealed that the summer prep program needs to be a fixed entity as numeracy and literacy issues among students will be continuously observed in the near future.

- 3) *Support services have been key in ensuring young people stay engaged.* Young people specifically mentioned bus tokens, food, assistance with getting financial credit, stipends, and counseling as being very influential in keeping them engaged. In fact, approximately 30% of enrolled students have utilized one-on-one counseling sessions across Cycles 2 and 3. Individual provider sites also offered additional support services including financial case management, assistance with vehicle purchasing, as well as general case management to help youth with personal and family difficulties.
- 4) *In Cycle 2, more than two-thirds of youth who completed the program (68%) have been placed in employment.* Additionally, youth have enrolled in higher education or found employment through different channels. Interviews with young people also indicate that most feel prepared for their jobs. Providers utilized a variety of different strategies, including inviting employers into the classroom to meet with students, implementing a trial run with an employer to ensure a student is the right fit, as well as helping with professional clothes, scheduling job interviews, and resume building. While Cycles 1 and 3 have lower proportions of youth placed in employment (43% and 47%, respectively), each of those cycles did face challenges that were not experienced in Cycle 2. In Cycle 1, recruitment started later in the year and many of the occupational training providers were starting to work with young people for the first time. In Cycle 3, the COVID pandemic greatly impacted opportunities for employment.
- 5) *Workforce and education systems are better aligned.* Since G2C was implemented, one of the biggest markers of success for systems alignment is the shift that has taken place in the Baltimore City Public School system from a college readiness office to a post-secondary advising model that now has G2C as an option for the students' plan. Additionally, the Career and Technology department has expanded and hired additional staff to ensure more teachers and students are aware of the program. On the workforce system side, providers have demonstrated an increased understanding about their role in supporting young people's development. For example, several reported initiating strategies specifically for this age group, including making home visits, hiring 'success coaches', increasing their communication with youth and their family members, and providing additional food and financial assistance.

In addition to the above accomplishments of G2C, there have also been important lessons learned, as described in the following section.

Key Lessons Learned

- 1) *Data sharing is challenging across system partners.* One of the biggest themes heard from systems-level interviews is the numerous obstacles that have been encountered in data sharing. Currently, there is no centralized data system, which means that each partner agency has their own data system and unique way of presenting data. Additionally, there have been several legal issues that have had to be addressed to share especially sensitive data across implementation

partner agencies. Training providers and summer prep providers have also reported not getting equal access to data that is being shared with core G2C staff.

- 2) *The COVID pandemic has had a big impact on G2C.* The most impactful disruptions were related to shifting to a virtual environment. Providers had to quickly learn new software, and students were facing difficulty in obtaining access to the internet. Many students did not have computers and the home environments were often not conducive to learning. While it still is uncertain about how the remote learning environment has impacted on student learning, it is important to note that the completion rate for Cycle 3 did not differ significantly from the completion rates in both Cycles 1 and 2.
- 3) *Funding is too dependent on foundational support.* Another frequent theme from the systems-level interviews was about funding. While Baltimore's Promise is the primary fundraising agency for G2C, several G2C staff and funders felt that G2C needs to think more critically about how it can be self-sustaining. A few participants felt that federal agencies need to be tapped, particularly from education and social services, which houses foster care, or even from Baltimore's government agencies. Others, however, worried that federal funds could be too restrictive, especially since there are often unexpected costs such as food provision or childcare that are often needed to ensure students stay engaged in the program.
- 4) *Youth engagement should continue and expand.* While a youth advisory panel has now been established to help select occupational training sites and provide general guidance, there are still additional ways that the voices of youth can be incorporated. A few participants of the systems-level interviews commented on the need to engage alumni of the program to not only help with recruitment, but also to help advocate for the program and increase awareness in the community about G2C. Current youth advisory panelists could also help in planning other means for staying engaged.



- 5) *Instructor quality is critical.* Qualitative data gathered from providers and youth participants showed that one of the most important components of the training program is the quality of the instructor. The quality of the instructor, as perceived by the youth, can often make the difference in whether a student remains in the program or gets placed in a job. Hands-on approaches, as well as good communication skills were two of the most important instructor skills. Additionally, training provider sites that had regular check-ins with instructors were also perceived to be important for addressing student issues that frequently emerged.

- 6) *Career readiness is occurring late.* Although G2C is designed to target high school seniors, several of the participants in the systems-level interviews felt that career readiness needs to start earlier in a child's trajectory. Some reported inviting occupational training providers into middle school classrooms to help students think about possible careers, and the skills needed for such careers, earlier. Additionally, one person reported that given the major challenge of low numeracy and literacy test scores, if students could take those tests and be referred to academic remediation earlier, it might ensure more students are prepared for various career trajectories by the time they reach their senior year.

Taking these findings together, our originally proposed evaluation aims can now be addressed. The first aim examined the feasibility, acceptability, and fidelity of G2C's implementation across the first three cycles. With regards to feasibility, evidence on enrollment, completion, job placement, and overall delivery of the key activities demonstrates that, indeed, G2C is a feasible model. G2C also has high acceptability, as evidenced from interviews conducted with youth participants, training providers, G2C core staff, and representatives from both education and workforce systems. Continued advocacy efforts should continue to enable parents, teachers, employers, and other community-based organizations to be aware of the program and support the activities of the program. Fidelity, however, is more challenging to assess for two main reasons: 1) occupational training provider sites all vary by length, type of occupational training, and number of slots, and 2) G2C is a demonstration project and by its nature, has continuously made changes from its original design. That said, if the implementation of the primary activities of G2C, as depicted in the logic model, are assessed, there is clear evidence from all our data collection activities that each component has been implemented well. There was some variability across training sites in the proportion of youth who completed and found employment post-training, and for some providers, these differences varied by cycle. Additionally, the COVID pandemic impacted on the rate of completion for Cycle 3, and most likely on employment, although Cycle 3 is still ongoing at the time of writing this report, and data for Cycle 3 is still being collected.

The second aim examined the extent to which systems-level changes and institutional alignment occurred to create a career pathway for youth participants. As evidenced already by the systems-level interviews, G2C has created several systems-level changes both in the education and workforce sectors. While several challenges remain, including addressing issues with data sharing, funding, continued numeracy and literacy problems, and the need to get more employers engaged, the strong partnerships and observed organizational shifts in the school and workforce sectors demonstrate that, overall, alignment efforts to date have been successful.

Finally, the third aim explored potential sustainability and scalability by identifying primary barriers and facilitators to effective implementation. As evidenced already across the data collected, primary barriers to sustainability and scalability include the need for a sustainable source of funding, lack of a centralized data system, the need for continued academic remediation, and an unequal distribution of stipends across training provider sites.

Meanwhile, primary facilitators include the strong G2C partnerships and shared staffing plan, continuous youth communication and engagement provided by the Participant Support Coordinator; trainings and counseling provided by the Mental Health and Well-Being Clinician, and the skilled instructors in both the summer prep and occupational training program sites.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The report's findings add to the growing evidence of the importance of career pathway approaches to reduce the numbers of disconnected youth, or opportunity youth. As noted by Opportunity Youth United, a national movement of young people and allies, the term opportunity youth is meant to convey both that "we are seeking opportunity and we offer the nation an opportunity if it would invest in ways for us to rebuild our communities and our lives."¹⁴ G2C is a demonstration program that is clearly invested in



youth at-risk for disconnection. As a partnership between the Baltimore City Public Schools, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, and Baltimore's Promise, G2C seeks to better align the educational and workforce development systems to not only reduce the proportion of opportunity youth, but also to improve the high unemployment rate and increase wages for those who have graduated in Baltimore.

Based on the findings from our process evaluation, the G2C demonstration model has been successfully implemented. Yet, a fundamental obligation of any society is to prepare young people to lead productive lives and ensure that they have a solid foundation of literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking needed for career development and lifelong learning. As evidenced by the large proportion of in-coming G2C applicants in need of academic remediation, further action is still needed to ensure that more youth in Baltimore can benefit and not be at increased risk of disconnection.

The following recommendations include both program-level and systems-level items that should be embraced by G2C partners and the broader network of school, workforce, and community-based agencies that have a stake in Baltimore's youth population.

Program-level Recommendations

Ensure that all youth participants receive stipends

While some training provider sites already provide youth participants with stipends, this is not uniform across sites. The need for immediate income is particularly important for this population of young people, who are often responsible for paying all the bills in the household. The lack of stipends may force young people to quit the job training program to seek out other means of acquiring income. This creates equity issues across training program sites.

Increase engagement with alumni and employers

While G2C has recently established a youth advisory panel among alumni, there is a need to further engage young people who have completed the program. They could be involved in a variety of ways, including helping younger youth with literacy and numeracy and advocating for the program in middle schools, as well as general recruitment. In particular, males who have completed the program could serve as program ambassadors and assistance with the recruitment of other male participants. Employers are another key group that need further engagement. Strong partnerships with employers can yield critical resources for both youth and training providers that may go far beyond job placement.

Systems-level Recommendations

Create a centralized data system

Creating a centralized data system would include hiring a permanent data support manager who could ensure that data was systematically collected and shared among all relevant personnel, including the core G2C staff, as well as summer prep and occupational training providers. Such a system would also allow for data to be continuously collected as youth are approached and 'travel' through different points, including recruitment, testing, participation, completion, certification, employment and during employment.

Actively seek out various funding opportunities

Current funding is dependent on foundations, but increased fundraising needs to occur to allow the program to expand and become a fixed entity. Participants in the systems-level interviews mentioned tapping into federal sources, such as education and social services, which has funds that could potentially

go towards this population of youth if representatives from such agencies were actively pursued. Expanding the scope of the Pell Grant to any post-secondary program that leads to gainful employment in a recognized occupation (such as G2C) may be one such approach. Yet, this requires a policy change at the federal level. Additional funding is also needed to support costs, such as food, clothing, and laptop computers, that often are not supported on current budgets.

Provide opportunities for earlier academic remediation

Given the enormous challenge of numeracy and literacy issues among young people in Baltimore, opportunities for earlier academic remediation should be considered. While G2C has quickly responded to the low test scores in math and reading by creating a summer prep program for G2C applicants, opportunities for testing and academic remediation should be done before the 12th grade to enable more students to be prepared to enter the program.

Expand the pathways approach for achieving career success

Although G2C has been working towards dispelling the “college or bust” mantra among educators, in truth, this mantra is deeply entrenched within our educational institutions across the country. Achieving a four-year college degree as the primary means for success may work well for those with sufficient access to resources and income, however, it does not work for a large majority of low-income and students of color who have found the education system often disjointed from the world of work. According to Symonds and colleagues, employers are increasingly complaining that today’s young people are not equipped with the skills needed to be successful in the workforce. “A focus on college readiness alone does not provide young people with all the needed skills.”¹⁵ If employers and educators could engage in a more collaborative approach to the education and training of the next generation of workers, it would produce both social and economic returns on investment.

G2C is one of the first programs in Baltimore that has started aligning the workforce and school systems. Yet, findings from the process evaluation suggest the process of alignment is beginning too late in a child’s trajectory. To ensure that all young people have equal opportunities to achieve success, there is a need for a pathway system that would start much earlier than high school. In fact, Symonds et. al. state that, “no later than middle school should all students have access to a system of employer involvement and assistance. In middle school, this would include career counseling, job shadowing, and opportunities to work on projects or problems designed by industry partners. In high school, it would include programs of study designed in collaboration with industry leaders, as well as opportunities for more intensive work-based learning such as paid internships.”¹⁵

While G2C has indeed begun to lay the foundation for this goal, more leadership from the school and city needs to be incorporated to create a stronger link between employers and educators. In doing so, not only will we reduce the risk of young people being disconnected from school and work, but we can greatly increase the economic prosperity and social connections in the communities that surround these young people.

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APPENDIX 1. CONTRACT SCOPE FOR TRAINING PROVIDERS

1. *Recruitment*: Awardees are responsible for enrolling eligible youth into the program, both through their efforts and working collaboratively with G2C staff. Providers must verify that potential enrollees meet age, residency, and graduation requirements. Additionally, all providers who receive referred enrollees from G2C staff must start the application process via ETOTM, an online case management software available through MOED and customized for training providers, within two business days. If providers recruit enrollees on their own, they are required to administer a G2C participant agreement as well as a consent form to allow their data to be used in a longitudinal study administered by Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.
2. *Program services*: Awardees are expected to provide the following workforce services with best practices in youth development and race equity and inclusion:
 - a. *Academic assessment*—for youth who are recruited by providers, providers are responsible for administering the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) Appraisal

- Form 80 for program placement purposes.
- b. *Enrollment and engagement* -- Once youth take the CASAS exam and pass at a satisfactory level, they will be routed to providers to complete the rest of the eligibility requirements for their desired program track. Providers are expected to accept potential enrollees to programs on an ongoing basis. If potential enrollees are unsuccessful in fulfilling the eligibility requirements for a provider, providers must inform the individual and refer the youth back to the G2C team in ETO™ within 48 hours of the communication to the youth. Providers must ensure that all ETO™ TouchPoints are up-to-date before referring the youth back to the G2C team
 - c. *Occupational training* -- Enrollees are marked as completing a training program when they have completed one or more program components or certificates that allow them to be employed in the field for which they are training and are in the placement phase. The provider should alert G2C staff of any enrollees who do not complete a training program. Youth should be referred back to the G2C team in ETO™.
 - d. *Centralized Wrap-Around Services* -- Based on the needs of youth, G2C offers two centralized wrap-around services: legal services and mental health/wellness services. Legal services are provided through a partnership with the Maryland Legal Services Corporation. In addition, G2C has a Counselor on staff to provide mental health/wellness services. Providers are expected to work closely with the Counselor and facilitate the logistics of group and individual services for enrollees in need of such services.
 - e. *Employment placement and retention* -- Awardees are responsible for assisting youth who complete occupational training find employment. For individuals who are placed in employment, the job placement information should be entered into ETO™ once the employment has been verified. Acceptable verification includes a pay stub, offer letter from employer, email from employer, or the Phone Verification Form (see Attachment D). Employment verification must include the youth's name, pay rate, start date, and benefits information. Verification documents are uploaded in ETO™. Providers record the information for youth who choose to enter college or other post-secondary education. Providers are expected to help youth within the retention period find a new job if they lose their job. After 180 days, providers can refer youth to one of the city's two Youth Opportunity (YO) centers for additional employment assistance.
3. *Meetings, Professional Development, and Training*: Awardees are expected to attend monthly meetings, ongoing ETO training, as well as training on youth development and racial equity and inclusion.
 4. *Data collection* -- Awardees will collect data using ETO™. Specific data that each training site needs to collect include: 1) demographic information; 2) intake information; 3) eligibility information; 3) occupational training information (including services that were provided); 4) employment or post-secondary placement information, and 5) close-out information (completion status and case notes).
 5. *Reporting* – Awardees are required to submit monthly, interim, and final reports.
 6. *Evaluation* – Awardees may have JHU researchers collect data for a process evaluation, as well as have site visits and observations conducted by G2C staff.