

# High School Reform in Baltimore:

Moving Toward Choice, Innovation and Achievement

Five Years of Progress

## The Core of Baltimore's High School Reform:

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- ◆ Small, supportive schools with clear, strong programmatic themes
- ◆ The freedom for all students to choose among high schools across the city
- ◆ Strong academic courses in every school
- ◆ High-quality teachers and principals who help students learn in all schools
- ◆ Students graduating from high school prepared for college
- ◆ Community partners who support students, parents, teachers, administrators



## The History of Baltimore's High School Reform

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BALTIMORE'S HIGH SCHOOL REFORM began in 2001 when the Baltimore City Public School System outlined a sweeping plan to reconfigure its nine large, comprehensive high schools and to open six to eight smaller, "innovation" schools. The plan called for all these high schools to have first-rate teachers, a rigorous curriculum and supportive services that would meet students' needs and foster learning.

The need to improve the large neighborhood high schools was dire. Those schools had virtually no advanced classes, and many teachers lacked training in important subjects, such as physics. Nor did they offer remediation for students who had failed. The schools' large, impersonal size made it harder for students to learn. Test scores were low, and about 60 percent of students were not graduating.

Baltimore isn't alone in its "small schools" philosophy: other cities also embrace this model. But early on, Baltimore realized that more than just a small size is needed to keep young people from falling through the cracks: It takes student supports, strong curriculum, and well-trained principals and teachers.

To implement the plan, the school system sought support from local and national foundations, which came together in a historic partnership and pledged \$20 million toward this exciting vision. The foundations selected the Fund for Educational Excellence, a local nonprofit committed to improving student achievement in Baltimore's

public schools, as their grantee and main reform partner.

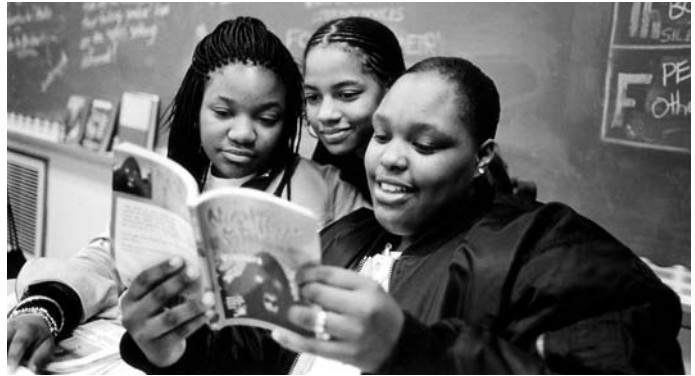
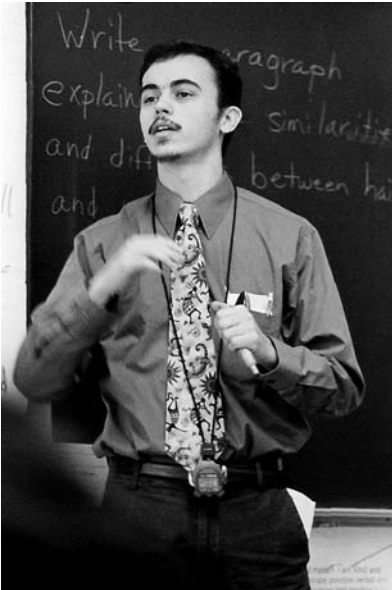
A broad partnership initiated this critically important effort to reform Baltimore's high schools. In addition to the school system, its board and the foundations, the group included the Maryland State Department of Education and the Baltimore Teachers' Union.

For all urban school districts, high school reform has proven to be a difficult proposition. During Baltimore's first five years of reform, the district confronted large challenges not uncommon to an urban district: three new superintendents, a multi-million dollar budget deficit and new, increased demands from the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In addition, with middle schools needing reform, incoming high school students continued to have academic deficits.

Despite these challenges, the commitment of the partners resulted in a good deal of progress. But while much has been accomplished, much remains to be done. Reform of all Baltimore's high schools will require a decade or longer and steadfast commitment.

## *Five years later, Baltimore high schools better serve students:*

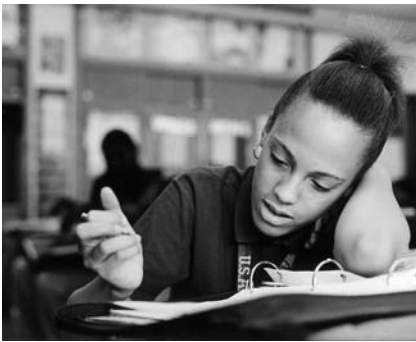
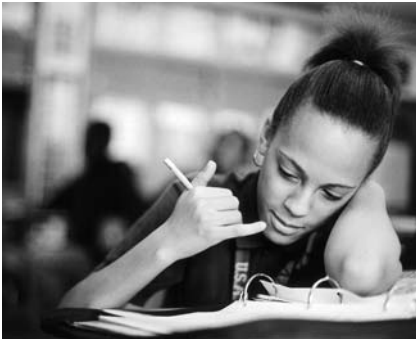
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- ◆ Six new innovation high schools were created: Baltimore Freedom Academy, Academy for Career and College Exploration, New Era Academy, Renaissance Academy, Coppin Academy, and Talent Development High School.
  
- ◆ Five of the nine original neighborhood high schools — Southern, Northern, Lake Clifton, Southwestern, and Walbrook — have been reconfigured into 12 new, small, theme schools.
  
- ◆ About 34 percent of Baltimore's 24,304 public high school students attend a reconfigured school or an innovation school.
  
- ◆ The district instituted a new policy allowing students to choose high schools that appeal to them, instead of automatically attending their neighborhood schools. More than 2,000 students and parents attended the annual High School Fair, and more than 90 percent of eighth-graders chose a high school for the 2007-08 year.
  
- ◆ More after-school programs have been added to support students' academic, employment, and social needs.
  
- ◆ A two-week Summer Bridge program prepares incoming freshmen for high school.
  
- ◆ New English, math, government and science courses prepare students to meet state standards.
  
- ◆ Students are improving their schools by participating in student government, urban debate, peer mediation, student courts, mentoring programs, and other activities.
  
- ◆ The re-established citywide student government gives students a greater voice in high school policies and programs.

*Five years later, students are performing better:*

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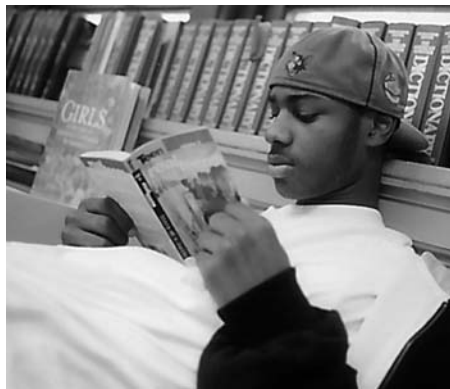
- ◆ Baltimore's scores on the state's High School Assessment exams, while still far too low, rose in 2006: algebra, up 15 percent; biology, up 18.6 percent; government, up 12.2 percent.
- ◆ SAT test-taking increased 57 percent from 2002 to 2006. PSAT participation jumped 31 percent for sophomores and 34 percent for juniors.
- ◆ College scholarships totaled \$47 million in 2006, a record high.
- ◆ In 2006, the attendance rate was almost 84 percent, and the graduation rate rose to nearly 61 percent — both the highest in a decade — as reported by the Maryland State Department of Education.
- ◆ Partners have brought new initiatives, teachers, and principals. The list is long but includes nationally-known programs, such as the New Teacher Project, Teach for America, New Leaders for New Schools and local partners, such as Johns Hopkins University and Coppin State University.



To learn more about Baltimore's High School Reform, please visit <http://www.ffee.org/>

Or contact:

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### **In Appreciation**

The Fund for Educational Excellence would like to thank the many high school reform partners, including: The Baltimore City Public School System, the Board of School Commissioners, the Maryland State Department of Education, and the Baltimore Teachers' Union. We also would like to thank the following local and national foundations that contributed dollars, expertise and ongoing guidance to the high school reform effort:

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Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation

Open Society Institute-Baltimore

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The unprecedented support of all of these partners and their unyielding focus on the needs of Baltimore's high school students have been a key underlying strength of the high school reform initiative.

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