

BUILDING A BRIGHT FUTURE

Understanding College
Readiness in Baltimore
City Public Schools

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FUND FOR
EDUCATIONAL
EXCELLENCE



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the Fund for Educational Excellence published *City Speaks: Community Voices on Baltimore Schools* in October 2014, we heard a lot from communities about academic outcomes for students in Baltimore City Public Schools. Participants in a months-long series of ‘kitchen table conversations’ told us that schools’ standards and expectations for students were too low. They feared that students were not graduating fully prepared for success in college or a first job that would earn them a living wage.

Baltimore communities are clearly attuned to the academic health of their schools. As we were wrapping up the *City Speaks* kitchen table conversations, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium released a reportⁱ detailing – among other important measures – remediation rates for City Schools graduates who go on to college. A startling 72% of our 2011 graduates who entered college the fall after high school graduation required remedial math classes. Thirty-eight percent (38%) needed remedial writing, and 35% needed remedial reading.ⁱⁱ Undergraduates who require remediation end up paying for developmental classes that are not credit-bearing, adding significant and unanticipated costs and time to their ability to earn a degree. The majority do not manage to earn one at all. Just over a quarter of the City Schools graduates who enroll in college the fall after graduation complete a degree within six years.ⁱⁱⁱ

The combination of City Schools graduates’ first-year college remediation rates and the perceptions of Baltimore communities about their students’ readiness for college or career motivated us to take a closer look at college readiness in 2015. We began this study with two objectives in mind:

- 1. To identify a comprehensive set of indicators of college readiness in order to communicate these with educators, students and their families and**
- 2. To understand the obstacles to college readiness for Baltimore City Public Schools students.**

Many of our students face significant challenges in their everyday lives, so how do we ensure that they stay on-track to graduate from high school prepared to be successful in college? We should start early. The earlier we begin to monitor their readiness and intervene with students who have fallen off-track, the better our chances. The research on college readiness yields a wealth of indicators that begin with enrollment in a formal pre-kindergarten program and run through the assessments used for college admissions and course placement. To identify a comprehensive set of college readiness indicators, we surveyed the research and mapped as many indicators as we could find. We wanted to be able to provide a clear picture of what it means to be academically ready for college and how City Schools – in partnership with students and their families – can track student readiness at every grade level. (See pages 18 and 19 for our full college readiness indicator map.)

Academic preparation is a critical component of college readiness, but we suspected it was not the whole story. To gain an understanding of the obstacles – academic or otherwise – that City Schools graduates face as they are entering college, we conducted a series of focus groups. From March through August 2015, we heard from 225 individuals in 27 focus groups about their experiences preparing for college in City Schools. Participants were current City Schools students, recent graduates now enrolled in area colleges and universities and parents of City Schools students. They raised a host of issues, but the themes we heard over and over again were as follows:

- 1. Students need a number of qualities and skills - including independence, responsibility and time management – in order to be successful in college.**
- 2. Students want greater access to strong college counseling and advising.**
- 3. Students and their families want more support around financing college.**
- 4. Students need a better understanding of what the college experience will actually be like.**
- 5. Students need rigorous academic preparation in order to succeed in college.**

We explore each in more detail on pages 10-14. Based on what we heard in the focus groups and on what the research says about academic readiness, the Fund developed a set of recommendations to address students' needs. We propose that City Schools – in partnership with Baltimore communities and students' families – take the following measures:

1. Form a committee of model and lead teachers, principals, district instructional experts and parents to re-work 6th through 12th grade instructional practices to promote a 'gradual release of responsibility' and push students toward independence in all of their classes.
2. Ensure that there is at least one full-time, dedicated school counselor on staff at each middle school, and invest in a citywide expansion of college advising services, such as CollegeBound.
3. Partner with a community organization to develop a college preparation course to be offered as an elective in every high school.
4. Develop – internally or with a partner organization – a college ambassador program that recruits City Schools alumni now in area colleges and universities and connects them with high school juniors and seniors.
5. Ensure that all students have the opportunity to take rigorous coursework. Offer Algebra I in 8th grade in every middle school and pre-calculus or trigonometry and calculus in every high school. Commit to offering a minimum of five Advanced Placement courses in every high school.
6. Issue annual progress reports like the example on page 21 to every student in City Schools beginning in kindergarten.



Founded in 1984, the Fund for Educational Excellence is a Baltimore-based non-profit organization that works to secure the resources necessary to support innovation and increase student achievement in City Schools. At the Fund, we focus our efforts on systemic changes to make City Schools a district where all children can thrive academically. For more information, call 410-685-8300, email info@fee.org or visit us online at fee.org.

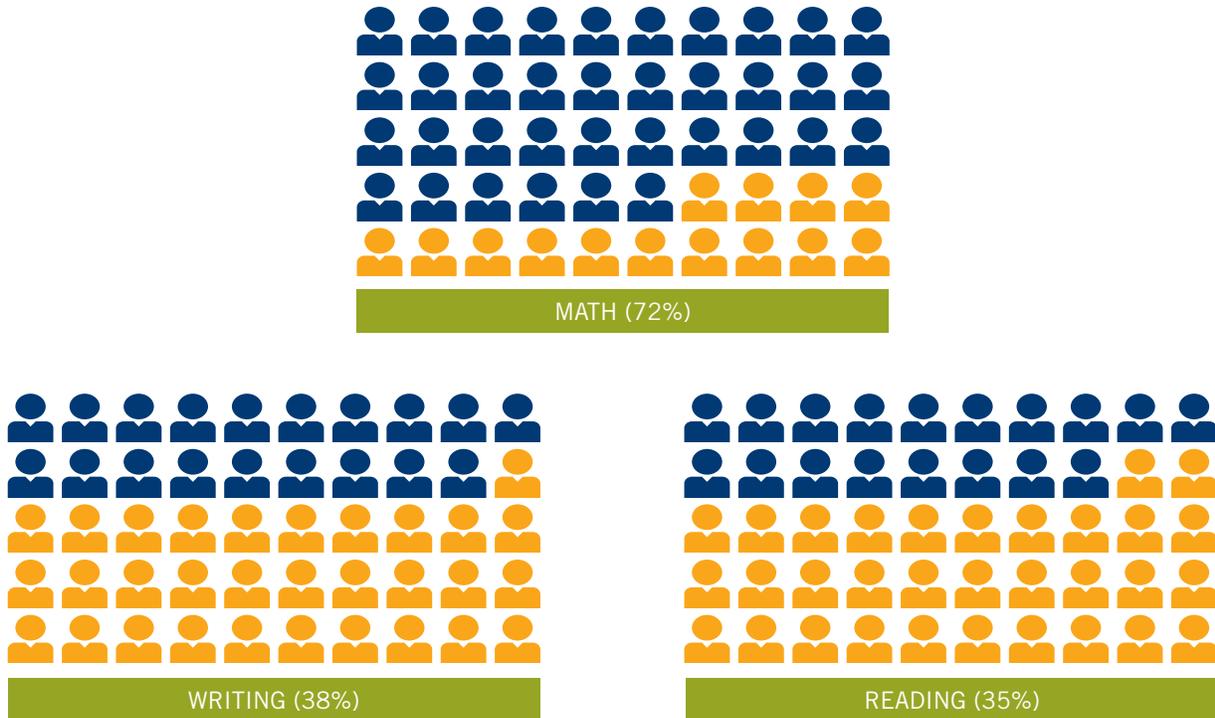


UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE READINESS IN BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

What does it mean to be college-ready? Very simply defined, college-readiness is the ability to successfully complete first-year undergraduate coursework without the need for academic remediation.

Almost three-quarters (72%) of Baltimore City Public Schools graduates enrolled in college require remediation in math. Thirty-eight percent (38%) need remedial writing, and 35% need remedial reading.^{iv}

FIGURE 1: 2011 City Schools graduates who enrolled in college the fall after graduation and required remediation in math, writing or reading.

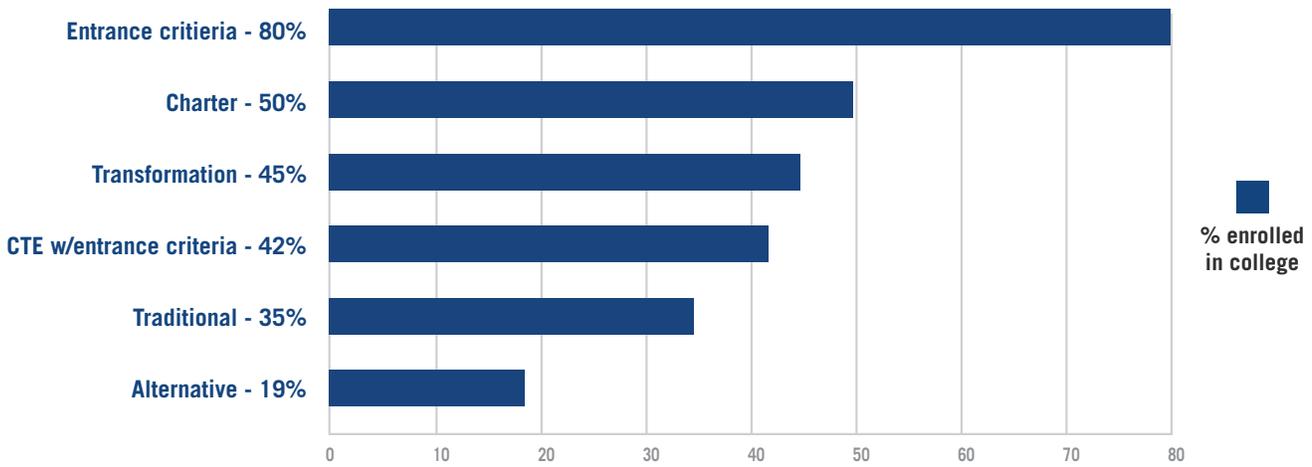


Source: *Indicators of College Readiness: A Comparison of High School and College Measures*, BERC.

Clearly, academics present some of the biggest obstacles to readiness for our students. Undergraduates who require remediation end up paying for developmental classes that are not credit-bearing, adding significant and unanticipated costs and time to their ability to earn a degree. With only 25.6% of City Schools graduates who enroll in college the fall after graduation completing a degree in six years,^v it is probable that City Schools graduates' high remediation rates play a role. Nationally, 55% of high school graduates who enroll in college complete a degree within six years, and the remediation rate for first-year undergraduates is 20%.^{vi}

Getting *to* college is the first step. In Baltimore City, where you go to high school appears to be a factor in your prospects for a college education.

FIGURE 2: Percent of City Schools graduates from classes of 2012 through 2014 who enroll in college the fall after high school graduation, by high school type.^{vii}



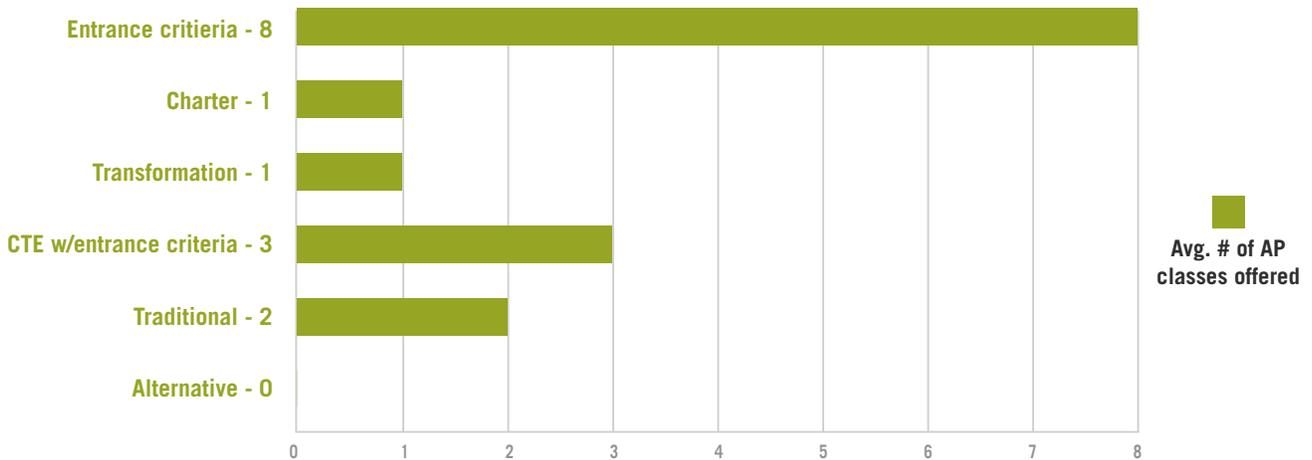
Source: *College Opportunities and Success: Baltimore City Graduates through the Class of 2014*, BERC.

‘Entrance criteria’ high schools like Baltimore City College and Baltimore Polytechnic Institute – which have the highest rates of college enrollment – admit students based on their middle school composite scores. A student’s composite score is primarily based on academic performance and attendance in *seventh grade*.^{viii}

Once a student enters high school, it is important to take challenging coursework in every year. To be truly prepared for college, experts recommend four years of math (with the final year being pre-calculus or calculus); four years of English; three years each of lab sciences, social sciences and foreign language; and at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course.

However, with the exception of our entrance criteria high schools, AP offerings are scant. Twenty-one (21) of our 44 high schools offer no AP courses.^{ix}

FIGURE 3: Average number of AP classes offered, by high school type.^x



Source: *Baltimore City Public Schools school search tool: schoolchoice.baltimorecityschools.org*.

In Baltimore City, we need to do a better job of equipping City Schools parents and students with the information they need to jointly navigate college preparation. All parents want the best for their children – educational opportunities, employment and financial prospects. Our students deserve better, more rigorous preparation for their post-secondary lives.

OUR APPROACH

While academic obstacles to college success are well documented – and of primary importance – we suspected they were not the whole story when it comes to the City Schools graduates' readiness for college. In an effort to understand the full range of obstacles that hold our graduates back once they enter college, we began holding focus groups on college preparation in the context of Baltimore City Public Schools in March and wrapped up the series in August 2015. A number of schools, area colleges and universities and community organizations coordinated focus groups on our behalf. On average, there were eight participants per group. Participants were parents of City Schools students, recent graduates of City Schools now enrolled at area colleges and universities and current middle and high school students. Discussions took place at a site designated by the coordinator. To ensure a consistent experience for participants, the Fund trained facilitators using a toolkit that included a standard set of questions for focus group discussions (see below).

In the end, we heard from 225 participants in 27 focus groups across Baltimore City about what college readiness means to them, what information they think would be useful for students and families to have at their fingertips as they prepare for college and what schools can do to better prepare students for their postsecondary lives. Eight-four percent (84%) of this study's participants were African-American. Almost half of participants (49%) did not report income data; of those who did not report, 73% were middle-, high-school- or college-age, leading us to believe that they did not know their families' annual income. Of those who did report income data, 61% were in the lowest two income brackets used by the Census Bureau, which approximate eligibility for FARMS.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR RECENT GRADUATES^{xi}

1. **What does the phrase 'college-ready' mean to you? What are the qualities and skills that someone who is ready to succeed in college possesses?**
2. **How did you prepare for college? What types of things did your middle and high schools do? What worked well? What would you like to see the district or the schools do differently?**
3. **Before you started here, how familiar were you with the Accuplacer^{xii} and how it is used? How much would you say you knew about the developmental courses that colleges require of many of their incoming first-year students?**
4. **What other information would have been helpful to have as you planned for your future? How should that information be packaged or presented in order to make it easily digestible and usable for students and their families?**
5. **What is the best way to reach middle and high school students? Their families? What about for those without regular home computer and internet access? What about those students or families who move homes and/or schools often?**

ORGANIZATIONS THAT HELPED US TO COORDINATE FOCUS GROUPS

Baltimore City College High School

Baltimore Urban Debate League

Benjamin Franklin High School at Masonville Cove

BridgeEdu

Center for Urban Families

Code in the Schools

Coppin State University

Cross-Country Elementary/Middle School

Elev8 Baltimore

John E. Howard Recreation Center

KIPP Baltimore

Lillian Jones Recreation Center

McDaniel College

Morgan State University

O'Donnell Heights Boys and Girls club

Southwest Baltimore Charter School

Towson University

University of Maryland – College Park

Urban Alliance

Wide Angle Youth Media

Woodhome Recreation Center

Youth as Resources

METHODOLOGY

With the consent of participants, focus group facilitators recorded each discussion; we then had each recording transcribed.

The Fund recruited and trained a pool of staff and volunteers to review transcriptions and identify two to four themes from each focus group discussion. Two volunteers independently reviewed each transcription and generated themes. Themes were those topics that dominated the discussion.

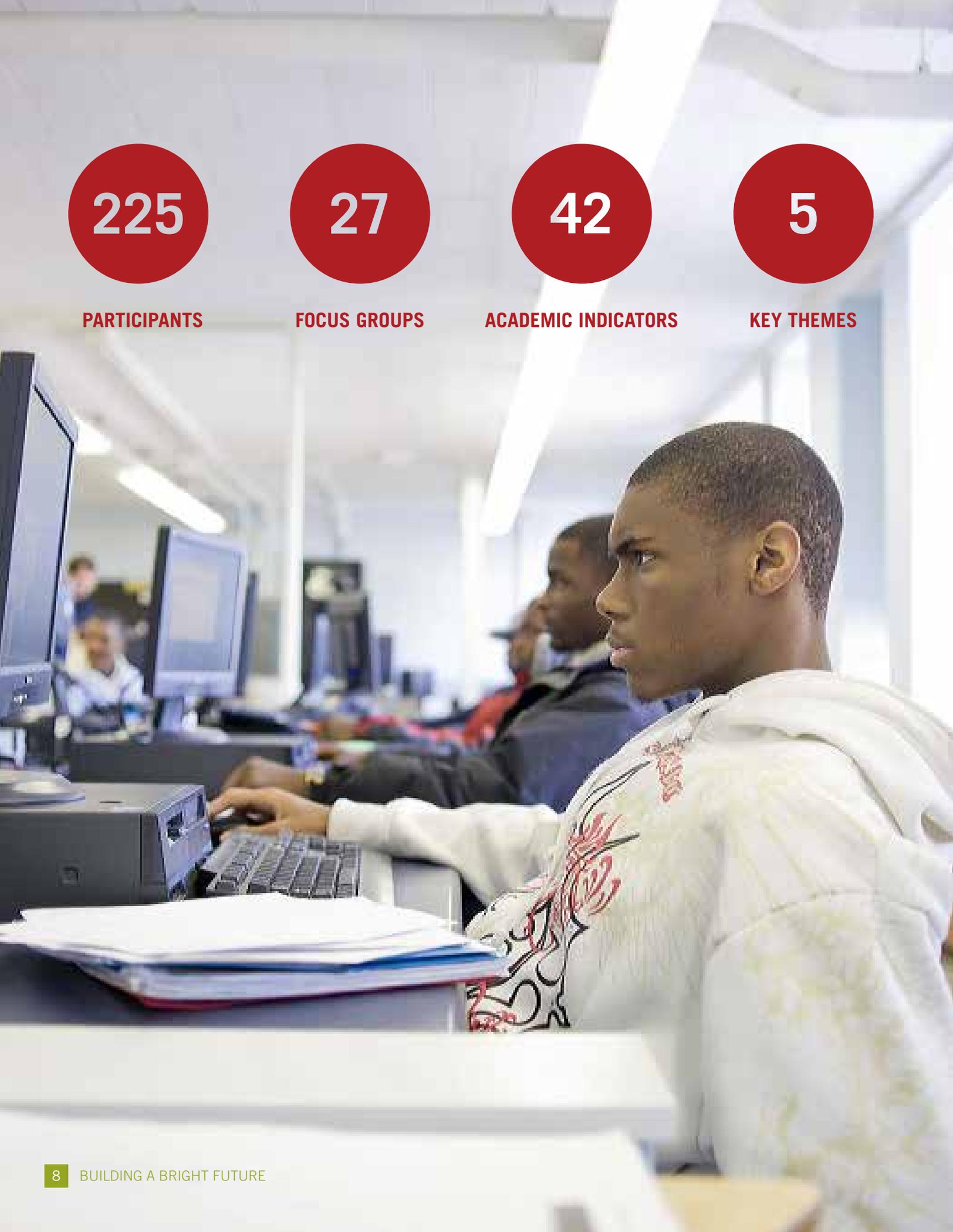
After two independent reviews of a transcription had been completed, our data analysis team looked at the themes identified by both reviewers. Only those commonly identified by both reviewers were labeled the key themes of the discussion. (In the few instances where there was no agreement between the initial two reviewers, we had a third person review the transcription.)

When we had identified key themes for each discussion, we grouped like key themes together to form topline themes. Those topline themes with the greatest density are the overall study's key themes.

WHAT WE HEARD

From 27 discussions, five key themes emerged that illustrate what parents, current students, and recent graduates think about college readiness in City Schools. Beginning with the largest (e.g., what was heard most from focus group participants), we go into more depth about each of these themes in the following pages. While one addresses the qualities and skills needed in order to be college-ready, most address needs – around information, supports and academics.





225

PARTICIPANTS

27

FOCUS GROUPS

42

ACADEMIC INDICATORS

5

KEY THEMES

THEMES AND FINDINGS

THEME: Students need a number of qualities and skills – including independence, responsibility and time management – in order to be successful in college.

- Above all, college readiness requires a certain level of maturity and responsibility.
- Social and academic intelligence and a strong work ethic are also factors in college readiness.
- Some skills that are key to college readiness are time management, good study skills and habits and goal-setting.

THEME: Students want greater access to strong college counseling and advising.

- Counselors sometimes have low expectations for Baltimore students and should help students more with college preparation.
- Students believe strong advising is key to college preparation.
- Every high school should offer a college preparation and/or mentoring program that includes discussion of practical skills – like budgeting, resume-building or maintaining a household – that students will need post-high school (whether they intend to go to college or not).

THEME: Students and their families want more information and support around financial literacy.

- Students need information about how to manage their finances – both for college and beyond.
- Students and parents need more and better information about how to finance college.

THEME: Students need a better understanding of what the college experience will actually be like.

- Recent graduates now attending area colleges and universities did not feel prepared for what college would be like.
- There was a strong sense of culture shock for Baltimore City graduates at the big differences between home and campus.
- College visits should help high school students experience what it is like to be a college student.
- Current high school students want access to current college students from similar backgrounds.

THEME: Students need rigorous academic preparation in order to succeed in college.

- Academic preparation is essential to college readiness.
- It is important for students to get into a college prep high school and keep their GPA up.
- Some students have access to resources and academic preparation that others do not.
- There is a lack of rigor in high school academics.

THEME: Students need a number of qualities and skills – including independence, responsibility and time management – in order to be successful in college.

Participants in this study shared many thoughts about the qualities and skills needed to be ‘college-ready.’ Maturity, independence and responsibility were the three most frequently mentioned qualities – with much of the discussion revolving around the idea that students need these qualities to be able to successfully manage their own time and affairs. Specifically, participants talked about understanding college course schedules and the very different pace of work. They placed particular emphasis on the fact that students are in class for less time, there is more unscheduled time and no one is really monitoring reading or other assignments. Students have to use that unscheduled time wisely, so they don’t fall behind. According to participants, good study habits and a strong work ethic contribute greatly to ‘getting your footing’ in the college environment.



“[B]eing responsible for your time, because you have to be able to manage your time more. You have to go to bed, so you can wake up and be at school on time. Then you have to come home and make time to do homework. You can’t really do whatever you want to do, because you still have to make all that time. Some people can’t do that. Some people aren’t really responsible when it comes to time management. I think it’s something you have to learn.”

— High school student

Participants also told us that they believe this type of time management should be explicitly taught before college. There was some frustration stemming from a feeling that one is expected to know how to operate independently and manage time responsibly upon arrival at college or entry into the workforce, but no one teaches students how to do that.



“I guess time management could be one that people are taught about, because I know people don’t really get taught that anywhere. When they’re going to their first job is when they’re finally taught that. You can’t go to your first job and then learn about it. You’re supposed to know beforehand. I don’t know, but I feel like they classify children as children, and then when you’re 18 they want them to become adults and do everything, but they don’t teach them all the stuff that they’re supposed to beforehand. That’s kind of impossible when you think about it. You don’t teach me this stuff, and as soon as I turn 18, you throw all this stuff in my face, and you expect me to do it, but you didn’t teach me that these past how many years.”

— High school student

Being comfortable with change and adaptable to new environments were qualities that participants also valued as contributing to college-readiness. In addition, many expressed the idea that college should be part of a bigger plan one has for one’s life. Students need to have a goal for themselves, an idea of what they want from college and where it’s going to get them.

THEME: Students want greater access to strong college counseling and advising.

Participants talked a great deal about the importance of counseling and college advising from individuals with a strong knowledge base who are caring and committed to students. Unfortunately, many participants felt that students did not have access to quality counseling in their schools. Some expressed disappointment in the low expectations school counselors seem to have for Baltimore students. Many felt that their school counselors could have helped them more but were focused primarily on a select few top students. Students were enthusiastic about College Bound and the staff and resources they provide. Those in schools that have a College Bound specialist wanted the program to be open to more students.



“We only had one guidance counselor for the entire senior class. She wasn’t of much help at all. She was always on a lunch break, or, if you didn’t have a 3.5 or higher, she would look at you and say, ‘Pack it up, sweetie. You’re going to community college.’ So, I felt like there needed to be more guidance counselors that actually cared.”

— College student

Several participants talked about finding mentors who essentially served as their informal college counselors or advisors, staying on top of what needed to be done and when, offering guidance at key decision points and providing whatever resources they could. Some found mentors through programs; for others, it was a teacher or family friend who worked with the student. Several participants stated that, if it were not for these mentors, they would not have made it to college.



“I think a lot of people in the school system that are supposed to be helping people go to the next level [of] education have a bias that they’re not aware that they have, because they are where they are. And assumptions made about people from Baltimore and inner-city kids.”

— College student

Aside from guidance through the college exploration and application process, participants want some kind of class or program dedicated to practical skills, or the logistics of entering college and living independently. They were concerned about how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (or FAFSA), how to register for classes and buy textbooks, how to manage their money effectively – even knowing how to cook a meal for themselves.



“I feel like some people will be like, ‘How many people plan on going to college?’ And everybody says ‘Yes,’ but they look at it though, ‘OK, we’re going to college, what’s the next step?’ They don’t think of it like that. They just say, ‘Oh, you’re going to college, that’s good.’ But at the same time, they’re not giving us any advice, no anything, to help us prepare for college.”

— High school student



“I think every school should have College Bound Foundation, because it really helps you. I think that should be in every school. They walk you through the application process, they take you to campus visits, they help you with the FAFSA, scholarships.... They help you and make sure you get into colleges.”

— High school student

THEME: Students and their families want more information and support around financial literacy.

Participants wanted more information about college costs and how to pay for college. They were interested in strategies and tools to save money for college. They worried about taking on debt and a lack of knowledge about different types of loans. They were interested in the intricacies of financial aid and how to apply for it – in particular, they wanted more guidance and support around completing the FAFSA. They also wanted to be able to plan for their expenses while on campus, including books and supplies.



“So I went to the school that gave me the most money in scholarships, but I didn’t realize that it was also the most expensive school. So yeah, they gave me a lot of money, but that’s because their tuition was high - like sky-high....I couldn’t pay them, and they wouldn’t release my transcripts, and it just got to be a lot of mess.”

— College student

There was also a great deal of discussion about financial management beyond college. Participants expressed a desire to learn how to file tax returns, apply for a credit card that meets their needs and buy a house. They also wanted advice on handling bills and rent and tracking and managing their spending habits.



“One thing you notice as you start the process to go to college, you start to get a lot of mail and email about taking loans out....Your first thought is, OK, well unless you have scholarships or financial aid to cover all your school – which, nine times out of ten, that don’t cover the whole thing - you have to take out a loan. This bank is offering me something; I’m just going to take it. But you’re really setting yourself up in the long run....there’s loans where they will give you money to go to school, and you don’t have to pay it off until six months after you graduate. They give you time to get your feet wet in your field, start getting your money, create your foundation, and then you can start paying them back. Instead of the bank like, ‘Okay. Well, I want my money now. You don’t have it – interest rate.’ And then you find kids paying twice back what they used at the end.”

— College student



“For me, I would have liked to be more prepared on the financial piece, handling bills, handling financial aid, loans, and just all of the money, since I have the independence, I have the money, what am I doing with it? I don’t want to blow it. How do I invest it safely?”

— College student

THEME: Students need a better understanding of what the college experience will actually be like.

Participants who have been to or are currently enrolled in college did not feel prepared for what the college experience would be like. Specifically, they discussed the sense of culture shock they felt on their college campuses. Several talked about having grown up and attended school in majority African-American neighborhoods with little exposure to the world, or even the city, beyond and how challenging it was to be in a new environment where they were suddenly the minority. Participants who had been to college were also caught off-guard by how little one-on-one attention they got from college instructors and administrators and would have liked better preparation for the increased volume of work.



“Some of the schools ethnically are so different. I chose a school based on my level of education and where I was accepted, but what I didn’t realize was that it was predominantly Caucasian, and it was the shock of my life. Just culture shock.”

— Parent



“I think what would be helpful is – you know how in high school you have a big sis/little sis where it would be a freshman and a senior thing? But I think it’d be really nice with maybe a junior in high school and then a sophomore in college, or something like that. So you can talk to them, especially if they’re in the same major or field that you want to [go into].”

— High school student

Current City Schools students want a better understanding of what the college experience will actually be like. They talked about wanting college visits to mimic the experience of being a student on campus, rather than the typical canned tour. They spoke of shadowing college students, sitting in on classes and staying overnight in a dorm. They also want regular access to current college students from backgrounds similar to theirs who can share their experiences and answer questions. There was a definite sense of needing to hear about college from those who are near-peers, rather than adults many years removed from the experience. One suggestion was for a buddy or mentoring program where there is a year-long relationship between a high school student and a college student who graduated from City Schools. Another idea was for City Schools graduates now in college to make themselves available to high school students on social media for conversations about the college experience.



“An actual student to come in and talk to, and not just a person from the [college’s] administrative office, an adult, but a student I can relate to, that’s in their freshman year now that’s about to be a sophomore.”

— College student

THEME: Students need rigorous academic preparation in order to succeed in college.

Participants talked a lot about the importance of rigorous academic preparation for college. Some felt as though they were largely prepared academically. More often, though, participants expressed that they were not as prepared as they should be, for a variety of reasons. They talked about the quality of instruction and lack of access to rigorous coursework, specifically when it came to higher-level math. There was a lack of understanding about how taking only three years of math might affect their performance on the Accuplacer (or similar placement tests) once they entered college. (*The State of Maryland recently changed the graduation requirement to four years of math beginning with students who started 9th grade in SY2014-15.*) A number of middle school students were also worried about not having access to Algebra I in 8th grade to prepare them for their high school math courses. (*Algebra I was offered in seven middle schools in City Schools in the 2014-2015 school year.*)^{xiii}



“I honestly didn’t know anything about placement tests. I wanted to be an engineer.... But when I got to [University of] Maryland...if I would have knew about it in high school...So I stopped at pre-calculus, but if I had known the math that goes into engineering, I would have went further in math. When I got here I was in remedial math, and I was like, ‘OK I don’t know what this is. I’ve never learned this a day in my life....’ It changed my whole focus of what I wanted to do.”

— College student



“When I went to take my Accuplacer, it said that the subject was elementary math.... I’m thinking it’s going to be regular addition, subtraction, and division, but it was whole other stuff. And that kind of scared me. And if this is elementary math, then what am I learning in high school?”

— High school student

There was quite a bit of discussion about inequities when it comes to access to rigorous coursework and attention or help from teachers and other school staff. Participants have a strong sense that some students are getting more or better-quality instruction and academic resources than others. It varies by school, but it also varies within schools. Many participants cited City College, Poly and Western high schools as examples of schools that provide rigorous academic preparation, but preferential treatment for top students in any school was raised as an issue as well.



“Like my geometry class, it was a sub all the time. So when we got to the test, they didn’t really know enough, so they just automatically passed us. So now in my math class now that I got, I’m struggling.”

— Middle school student



“I think those kids that aren’t being put in those other classes don’t get the same things. For example, some of us didn’t even learn – not a lot of us learned the Algebra we needed to know, and I feel like it’s going to be really, really, really tough in high school because we didn’t learn the [Algebra].”

— Rising high school student



“And I’m not in the top five, but I was definitely in the top maybe 25, and I wasn’t receiving the same amount of help, and I saw other people not receiving the same amount of help.”

— College student

FIGURE 4: Top three focus group themes by stakeholder.

	THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3
Recent graduates	Students want greater access to strong college counseling and advising.	Maturity, time management and work ethic are the qualities and skills students need to have in order to be successful in college.	Students and their families want more information and support around financial literacy.
Parents	Students and their families want more information and support around financial literacy.	Social intelligence and independence are the qualities and skills students need to have in order to be successful in college.	Getting parents involved in college preparation is important for readiness.
Current City Schools students	Responsibility, independence, goal-orientation and strong study habits are the qualities and skills students need to have in order to be successful in college.	Students need a better understanding of what the college experience will actually be like.	Students need rigorous academic preparation in order to succeed in college.

Other Key Findings

As part of our larger college readiness efforts, the Fund has committed to developing – in partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools – a toolkit to help students and their families prepare for college. In our focus groups, we asked students and parents what types of information, resources and tools they would like to see included in a toolkit. We also asked them about the best way to get a toolkit into the hands of students and families. Although it did not rise to the level of theme, we did hear quite a bit about dissemination from focus group participants and want to include a few words about some of their ideas here.

We heard from students that social media, video and apps are the best ways to reach students. They also told us that they would be more likely to use a toolkit if it came to their attention from someone they either know or look up to. Participants also told us that sending a letter home about a new resource is still a good way to get the attention of parents of middle-grades students.

Finally, City Schools graduates’ high remediation rates made us wonder about schools’ use of the Accuplacer or students’ awareness of it before they were required to take it. The Accuplacer – a College Board assessment in math, reading and writing – is used by many colleges to determine student placement in first-year courses. Colleges set cut scores for entry into their freshman-level courses. When students score below the cut score for a subject, they are placed in remedial, or developmental, courses. They pay for these courses, but they are non-credit-bearing – a situation that sets them behind academically and financially from almost their first day on campus. What we heard from current student and parent participants in our study was an almost total lack of awareness about the Accuplacer. Recent graduates now in college told us that they were largely unaware of what it was or of the impact it could have on their college experience before they had to take it.



BUILDING BLOCKS: MAPPING COLLEGE READINESS INDICATORS

Awareness of the Accuplacer and its significance is only one of many building blocks for a successful start to college. A survey of the available research on indicators of college readiness yields a wealth of information about what it looks like to be on track to successfully tackle college coursework without a need for remediation – starting with early childhood. As a reference, we have constructed a map of all of the college readiness indicators we found (see pages 18 and 19) in the research. If we want to change the postsecondary trajectory of so many City Schools graduates, we need to make these indicators digestible and actionable for students, families and school staff. We propose doing that through a series of annual college-readiness progress reports for students and their families (see Recommendations on page 20).

FIGURE 5: A key building block to college readiness: a rigorous recommended high school course schedule.^{xiv}

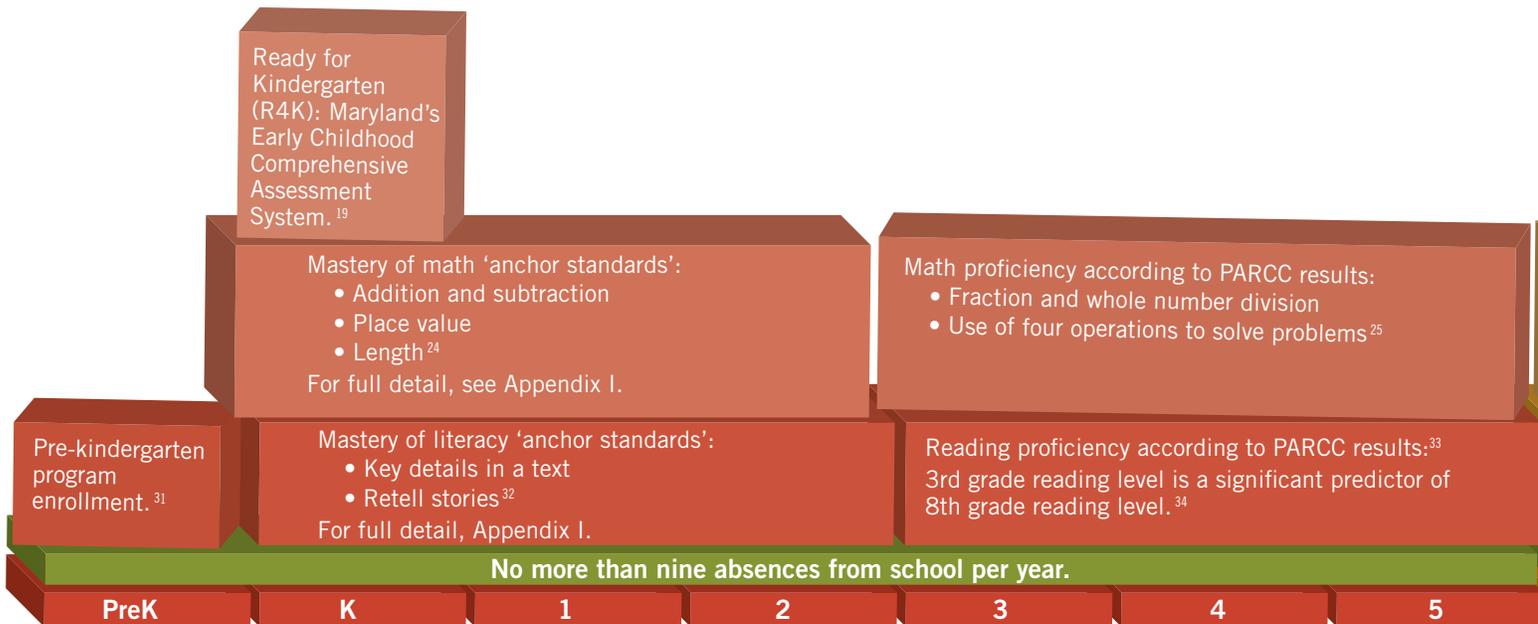
FRESHMAN YEAR	SOPHOMORE YEAR	JUNIOR YEAR	SENIOR YEAR
English I	English II	English III or Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition	English IV or Advanced Placement (AP) Literature and Composition
Math: Geometry/Algebra II (sequence of Geometry and Algebra II dependent on school offerings)	Math: Geometry/Algebra II (sequence of Geometry and Algebra II dependent on school offerings)	Math: Pre-calculus	Math: Calculus
Science: Biology	Science: Chemistry	Science: Physics or other science elective Examples: Microbiology, Anatomy and Physiology, Environmental Science	Optional Science: Advanced Placement Course (AP) Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Physics or science elective
History/Social Science: American Government	History/Social Science: World History	History/Social Science: US History	Optional History or Social Science: Advanced Placement Course (AP) US Government, US History, European History, Psychology, Human Geography or social science elective
Foreign Language	Foreign Language	Foreign Language	

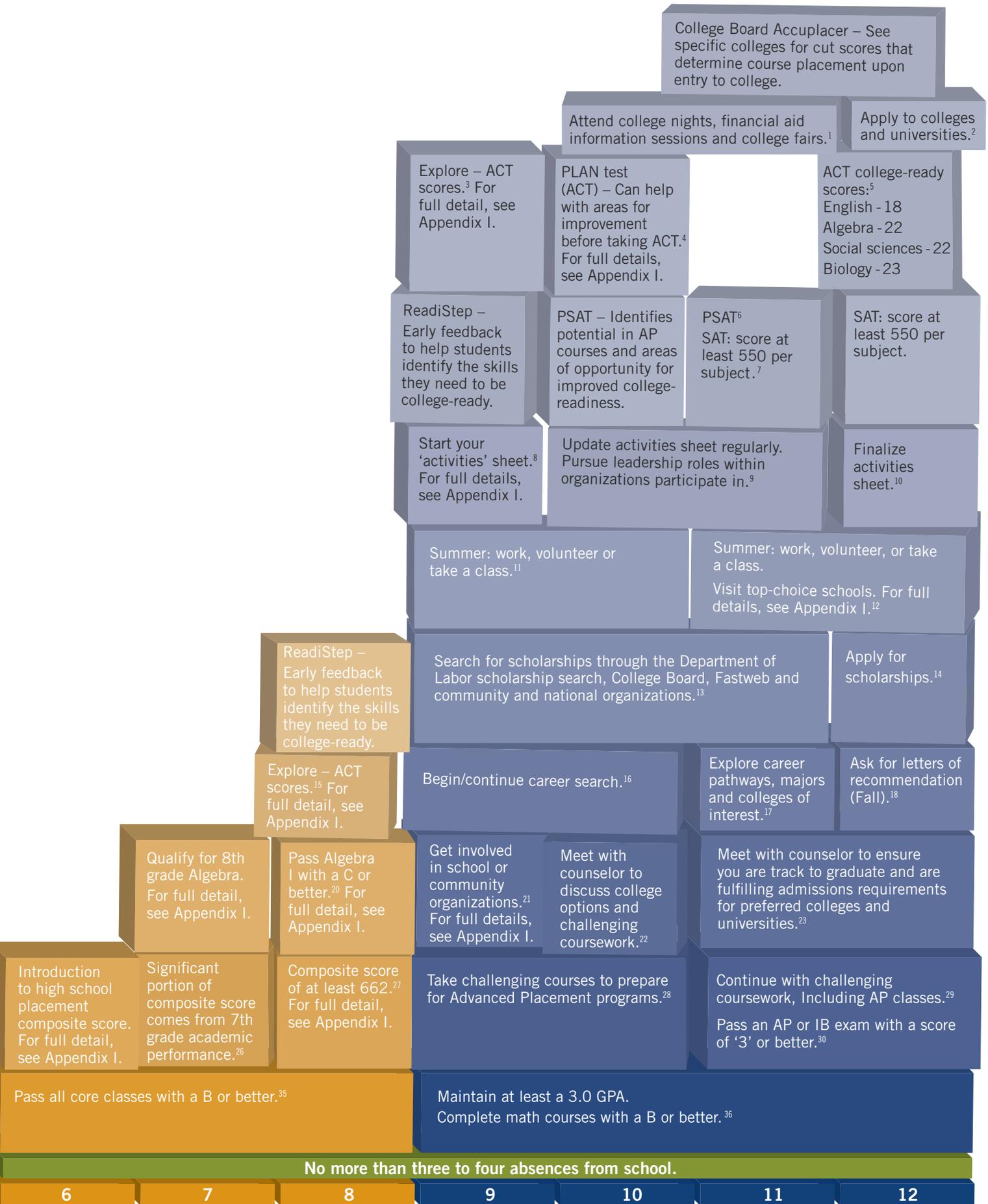
Source: *Embedding College Readiness Indicators in High School Curriculum and Assessments*, Education Commission of the States.

FIGURE 6: Map of college readiness indicators from pre-kindergarten through high school.

KEY INDICATORS OF COLLEGE READINESS

EARLY CHILDHOOD	Enrollment in a pre-kindergarten program
ELEMENTARY	Reading proficiency and ability to divide both whole numbers and fractions in third grade
MIDDLE GRADES	Pass Algebra I with a 'C' or better in 8th grade
HIGH SCHOOL	Score at least 550 per subject test on the SAT; pass an Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exam with a score of '3' or better





WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

A lot of momentum is gathering around the issue of college readiness in Baltimore with both City Schools and a number of other organizations examining student- and school-level data and developing and implementing strategies to increase students' readiness. We hope that what we heard from our focus group participants helps to explain why there is such a gap between City Schools graduates' college enrollment rates and their success upon entry. And we encourage City Schools and its many partners to listen to the words of current students, recent graduates and parents as they work to enhance efforts already underway and explore new ways of addressing students' college readiness needs.

While the themes outlined in the previous pages come solely from focus group discussions among City Schools parents, recent graduates and current students, what follows are the Fund's recommendations to address the needs highlighted in those discussions:

- 1. Form a committee of model and lead teachers, principals, district instructional experts and parents to re-work 6th through 12th grade instructional practice to promote a 'gradual release of responsibility' and push students toward independence in all of their classes.** While there will always be outliers on either end of the independence spectrum, City Schools teachers can and should develop in their students some of the skills and qualities necessary for college readiness – starting in the 6th grade.
- 2. Ensure that there is at least one full-time, dedicated school counselor on staff at each middle school, and invest in a citywide expansion of college advising services, such as CollegeBound, installing a college specialist in every high school and two in high schools where the senior class exceeds 200 students.** These are not sufficient measures to ensure adequate college counseling for every student who wants to go to college, but they would be promising first steps toward a larger needed investment in our students' postsecondary lives.
- 3. Partner with a community organization to develop a college preparation course to be offered as an elective in every high school.** Course content would include a primer on different types of financial aid, a catalog of scholarships Baltimore City students have had some success being awarded, and dedicated class time for college application and FAFSA completion. Juniors and seniors would also take the Accuplacer as part of the course.
- 4. Develop – internally or with a partner organization – a college ambassador program that recruits City Schools alumni now in area colleges and universities and connects them with high school juniors and seniors.** The type of relationship could look different depending on the preferences and locations of both parties, but possibilities for ambassadors might include:
 - a. A buddy-type relationship, essentially mentoring one student for an extended period of time;
 - b. Volunteering to visit a number of schools during the year to share their college and transition-to-college experiences with small groups and answer questions or
 - c. Simply making themselves available via email or Twitter for consultation.
- 5. Ensure that all students have the opportunity to take rigorous coursework. Offer Algebra I in 8th grade in every middle school and pre-calculus or trigonometry and calculus in every high school. Commit to offering a minimum of five Advanced Placement courses in every high school.** Administer the Accuplacer to all students at the end of their junior year of high school, so students are aware of any learning deficits well before the end of high school and have some time to address them before graduation. Provide dual enrollment options, so students who need to can take developmental courses during their senior year and so those who don't need remediation have the opportunity to experience college-level work and graduate from high school with transferrable credits.
- 6. Issue annual progress reports like the example on page 21 to every student in City Schools beginning in kindergarten.** In the elementary and middle grades, these progress reports should be the starting point of a conversation between a student's parents or guardians and his/her teachers about the college readiness indicators at the child's current grade level, whether the child is on track to graduate ready for college and what interventions would be helpful if s/he is not. At the high school level, progress reports should be mailed home to parents and used by teachers as the starting point of a discussion with each student about his/her postsecondary options and, if desired, path to college.

Mason Jackson

Attendance rate: 95%

Child's grade



2nd grade

Summary of focus for the year



Is my child on track to be college-ready by high school graduation? In second grade, your child should be building strong reading and math skills and understand the importance of attending school every day.

Indicators



Suggested resources/
Interventions



Student's Skills

Ways to support your child's learning

Reading stories, including fables and folktales from different cultures, and identifying the lesson or moral of the story

Reading texts about history, social studies, or science and identifying the main idea

Answering who, what, where, when, why, and how questions about stories and books

Describing the reasons that an author gives to support a point

Learning and using new words

APPENDIX I: ADDITIONAL DETAIL FROM COLLEGE READINESS INDICATOR BUILDING BLOCKS

KINDERGARTEN through 2nd GRADE

Literacy ‘anchor’ standards

KINDERGARTEN	1st GRADE	2nd GRADE
With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.	Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.	Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.	Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.	Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in story, poem, or song.

Major math standards

KINDERGARTEN	1st GRADE	2nd GRADE
Know number names and the count sequence.	Represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction.	Represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction.
Count to tell the number of objects.	Understand and apply properties of operations and the relationship between addition and subtraction.	
Compare numbers.	Add and subtract within 20.	Add and subtract within 20.
Understand addition as putting together and adding to, and understand subtraction as taking apart and taking from.	Work with addition and subtraction equations.	
Work with numbers 11-19 to gain foundations for place value.	Extending the counting sequence.	
	Understand place value.	Understand place value.
	Use place value understanding and properties of operations to add and subtract.	Use place value understanding and properties of operations to add and subtract.
	Measure lengths indirectly and by iterating length units.	Measure and estimate lengths in standard units.
		Relate addition and subtraction to length.

3rd through 5th GRADE

Indicators for 3rd through 5th grade are complete in the original indicator map.

6th GRADE

High schools with entrance criteria require a minimum composite score for admission. Learn about what makes up the composite score and its impact on high school admissions. The 'entrance criteria' high schools use slightly different weightings but all look at these criteria:

- i-Ready math percentile
- i-Ready reading percentile
- Final grades in 7th grade math, science and English plus first quarter grades in 8th grade math, science and English
- Overall grade, determined as the average of your grades in math, science, English and social studies from 7th grade and the first quarter of 8th grade
- Attendance, calculated as the percent of days you were present at school in the first quarter of 8th grade

7th GRADE

Qualify for Algebra I in the 8th grade:

- Identification as gifted & talented;
- Pass 7th grade honors math with an 80% or better; or
- Score 85% or better on end-of-course assessment based on Maryland College and Career Ready standards

8th GRADE

A student's performance in 8th grade math often informs placement and access to rigorous course content in high school.

- Pass Algebra I with a 'C' or better or
- Assessed as at least proficient on 8th grade Algebra exam (aligned to Maryland College and Career Ready standards)

Earn a composite score of at least 662. A minimum composite score of 610 is required in order to be eligible for admission to Baltimore City College, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Paul Laurence Dunbar and Western. However, for SY15-16, the lowest composite scores accepted at City and Poly were 662 and 682 respectively.

8th or 9th GRADE

Take the EXPLORE – ACT. College-ready indicator scores are as follows:

- English: 13
- Reading: 16
- Math: 17
- Science: 18

9th GRADE

- Get involved in school or community organizations, such as volunteering, summer enrichment programs or clubs.
- Start your 'activities' sheet. Compile a list of all awards, work (volunteer or paid) and extracurricular activities.

10th GRADE

PLAN test (ACT) helps identify your likely score on ACT test in the future. Can help determine your areas to improve before taking the ACT. College-ready indicator scores are as follows:

- English: 15
- Reading: 18
- Math: 19
- Science: 20

11th and 12th GRADE

Visit top-choice colleges and universities. Learn about school or program requirements and deadlines.

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Nicole Yeftich



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- ii Faith Connolly, et. al., *Indicators of College Readiness*, BERC, September 2014.
- iii Rachel E. Durham, et. al., *College Opportunities and Success: Baltimore City Graduates through the Class of 2014*, BERC, November 2015. This percentage includes students in two-year programs who initially started part-time. It does not account for students who successfully completed certificate programs but did not earn a degree.
- iv Faith Connolly, et. al., *Indicators of College Readiness*, BERC, September 2014.
- v Rachel E. Durham, et. al., *College Opportunities and Success*, BERC, November 2015.
- vi *First-Year Undergraduate Remedial Coursetaking: 1999-2000, 2003-04, 2007-08*, Statistics in Brief, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, January 2013.
- vii Rachel E. Durham, et. al., *College Opportunities and Success: Baltimore City Graduates through the Class of 2014*, BERC, October 2015. Transformation schools are operated by independent education entities, and each has a specific theme and a unique curriculum that focuses on college, career or alternative programming. CTE is an abbreviation for Career and Technological Education.
- viii See Baltimore City Public Schools composite score worksheet: <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/md01001351/centricity/domain/43/pdf/composite-score-sheet.pdf>.
- ix While Baltimore City College and Bard Early College have limited AP offerings, they offer universal access to International Baccalaureate and college-level coursework respectively.
- x Baltimore City Public Schools school search tool: schoolchoice.baltimorecityschools.org.
- xi We asked parents and current students slight variants of the same questions.
- xii The Accuplacer is a College Board assessment in math, reading and writing used by many colleges to determine student placement in first-year courses.
- xiii Maryland State Department of Education report card for Baltimore City Public Schools, PARCC Algebra I Assessment Performance Results, 2015.
- xiv Jennifer Dounay, *Embedding College Readiness Indicators in High School Curriculum and Assessments*, High School – Transition to Postsecondary Education, Education Commission of the States, April 2006.

FIGURE 6: Key Indicators, pages 18-19:

- 1 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/prepare-for-college/checklists>
- 2 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 3 *What Are the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks?* ACT Research and Policy, September 2013.
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- 5 *Using Your ACT Results*, The ACT, 2014-2015.
- 6 Thomas P. Proctor, et. al., *PSAT/NMSQT Indicators of College Readiness*, The College Board, 2010.
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- 8 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 9 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 10 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 11 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 12 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 13 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 14 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 15 *What Are the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks?* ACT Research and Policy, September 2013.
- 16 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 17 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 18 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 19 R4K – Ready at Five, Maryland State Department of Education, <http://www.readyatfive.org/download-document/getting-ready/getting-ready-1/documents/780-r4k-overview/file.html>.
- 20 *Creating a P-20 Continuum of Actionable Academic Indicators of Student Readiness*, Achieve – American Diploma Project Network, 2013.
- 21 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 22 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 23 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 24 Common Core State Standards – Major Standards for Math, Baltimore City Public Schools Director of STEM.
- 25 *Creating a P-20 Continuum*, Achieve, 2013.
- 26 See Baltimore City Public Schools composite score worksheet: <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/md01001351/centricity/domain/43/pdf/composite-score-sheet.pdf>.
- 27 The minimum score for a student admitted to Baltimore City College in SY14-15 was 662. See <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/24677>.
- 28 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 29 Federal Student Aid Prepare for College checklist
- 30 Faith Connolly, et. al., *Indicators of College Readiness*, BERC, September 2014.
- 31 *Investing in Early Childhood Development and Learning is Key to the Success of Our Children and Our Nation's Long-Term Economic Growth*, Children's Defense Fund, July 2014.
- 32 Common Core State Standards – Anchor Standards for ELA/Literacy, Common Core State Standards Initiative.
- 33 *Creating a P-20 Continuum*, Achieve, 2013.
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- 36 Faith Connolly, et. al., *Indicators of College Readiness*, BERC, September 2014.



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