

Reinventing the Secondary School Experience

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) has set out to “Reinvent the Secondary School Experience” to improve academic achievement and to increase the graduation rate. This strategy was launched in 2007, in response to data indicating low academic achievement among high school and middle school students. Maryland state data from school year 2006-07 indicated that only five of every 10 students entering high school graduated with a diploma, and fewer than three of those students would enroll in college. In addition, almost 1,300 middle school’s students in City Schools were at least two years over age compared to their cohort.

City Schools launched and expanded a series of initiatives to improve academic and career outcomes:

- *Transformation Schools*: City Schools is on track to open 24 new Transformation Schools by SY 2011-12. Operated in partnership with outside organizations, Transformation Schools are combined middle/high schools with a unique theme and strong college, career, credit recovery or dropout prevention focus. Transformation Schools were launched along with district-wide high school choice, which allows students and parents to select a high school option that best meets their needs and goals.
- *Alternative Options Programs (AOP)*: City Schools has expanded the number of programs which serve students who are over-age and under-credited to assist them to graduate from high school sooner, and to provide them with career training.
- *Great Kids Comeback*: In the Fall of 2007, City Schools launched the Great Kids Come Back campaign to reengage the students who dropped out of high school during SY 2007-2008.
- *Bridge Plan for Academic Validation*: Eligible students can complete a number of subject-based projects as an alternative to satisfying the High School Assessments in order to meet graduation requirements.
- *Expanding Great Options*: Finally, to ensure that all students have the opportunity to choose a school program that meets their needs and interests, City Schools will continue to close any school with a lengthy history of low performance. At the end of the 08-09 school year, six low-performing school programs were closed.

These initiatives and programs are funded through City Schools’ general funds, though start-up costs for Transformation Schools are provided by private foundations and donors. While only one year of data is available since the implementation and expansion of these initiatives, early indicators suggest that we will see more dramatic and positive trends in future years. The graduation rate increased by 2.5 percentage points and the dropout rate fell by percentage points between 2007 and 2008; 96 percent of 12th graders met graduation requirements for SY08-09; more students are taking and passing the High Schools Assessments; and seven schools exited the persistently dangerous list for SY09-10.

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