



Reason

#426

12/2013



# Weighted Student Formula Yearbook

*Baltimore*

by Katie Furtick & Lisa Snell

# Baltimore City Public School District

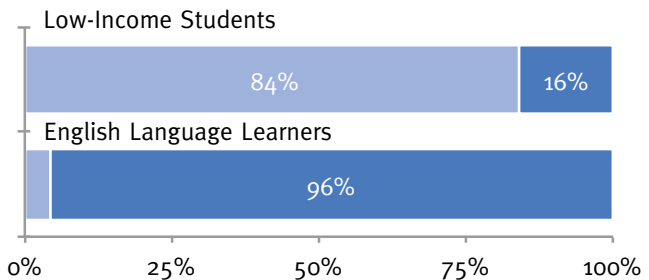
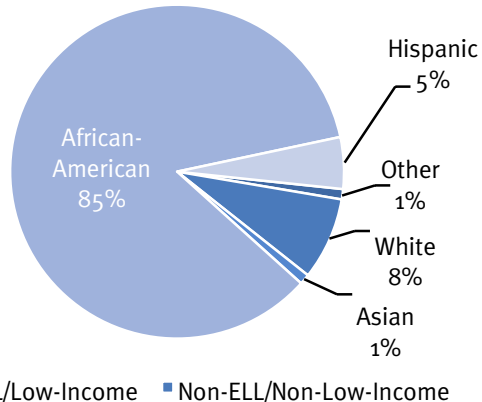
**Program Name:** Fair Student Funding  
**Implementation:** 2008–2009 School Year  
**Program Type:** District-Wide Program  
**Legal Authorization:** School Board Policy

**Overall Grade: F**

| Category                                      | Grade | Rank* |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Overall Grade **                              | F     | 14    |
| Principal Autonomy                            | D     | 12    |
| School Empowerment Benchmarks                 | A     | 6     |
| 2011 Proficiency Rates                        | F     | 15    |
| Proficiency Rate Improvement                  | F     | 14    |
| Expected Proficiency vs. Actual               | C-    | 12    |
| Expected Proficiency Improvement              | F     | 15    |
| 2011 Graduation Rates                         | F     | 13    |
| 2011 Achievement Gaps                         | A-    | 2     |
| Achievement Gap Improvement                   | F     | 14    |
| Achievement Gap Closures:                     |       |       |
| ■ <i>Internal District</i>                    | F     | 13    |
| ■ <i>Internal District vs. Internal State</i> | C-    | 11    |
| ■ <i>External Achievement Gaps</i>            | C-    | 11    |

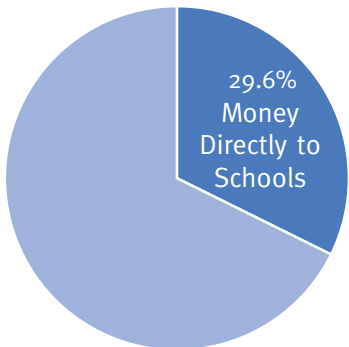
\* Tied with Newark, Boston, Houston, Denver, Hartford and Minneapolis for "School Empowerment Benchmarks" rank.  
 \*\* Overall grades and ranks may not equal the average of individual grades and ranks because categories are weighted differently to reflect their importance.

## Demographics



Source: BCPS By the Numbers 2012–2013

## 2012–2013 Principal Autonomy



Source: BCPS 2012–2013 Operating Budget

## School Empowerment Benchmarks

|                                                    |     |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| School budgets based on students not staffing      | Yes |
| Charge schools actual versus average salaries      | No  |
| School choice and open enrollment policies         | Yes |
| Principal autonomy over budgets                    | Yes |
| Principal autonomy over hiring                     | Yes |
| Principal training and school capacity building    | Yes |
| Published transparent school-level budgets         | Yes |
| Published transparent school-level outcomes        | Yes |
| Explicit accountability goals                      | Yes |
| Collective bargaining relief, flat contracts, etc. | Yes |

**BCPS Met 9 out of 10 School Empowerment Benchmarks**

## 1. Overview of Baltimore’s Weighted Student Formula Program

Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) has 204 schools with 84,748 students. The student population is 85 percent African-American, 8 percent White, and 5 percent Hispanic; 84 percent of students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.<sup>1</sup> Andres Alonso became the CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools in the summer of 2007. His governing motto was that “every school should be a school I want to send my kids to.” In order to make every school higher quality he moved quickly to decentralize school finances, empower school principals and offer parents more school choice. Alonso was able to decentralize schools quickly because of a unique clause in his contract with the school board that gave him significant autonomy in exchange for greater accountability for the results of his policies. The contract stated explicitly that individual board members agreed not to direct Alonso or anyone on his staff “regarding the management of [the school system] or the solution of specific problems.” They also agreed to refer all complaints to him.<sup>2</sup> Superintendent Alonso resigned as of June 30, 2013 and a national search is underway for a new district Superintendent.

Less than one year after Alonso became the BCPS CEO, on April 15, 2008, the Board of School Commissioners approved the BCPS system’s decentralization plan—called Fair Student Funding—by a vote of nine to seven. The Fair Student Funding Plan shifted resources and discretion over those resources from City Schools’ central office to its 202 schools and programs. Under the Fair Student Funding Plan schools received more resources and more flexibility over those resources so that decisions about students could be made by school leaders rather than the central office. This shift in resources reconfigured the central office administration so that it became leaner and more supportive of schools.<sup>3</sup>

Baltimore’s Fair Student Funding plan was based on the following goals:

- Create a system of great schools led by great principals, with the authority, resources and responsibility to teach all students well.
- Engage those closest to the students in making key decisions that impact the students.
- Empower schools and then hold them accountable for results.
- Ensure fair and transparent funding that schools can count on annually.
- Size the district appropriately—both the schools and the central office—to address the realities of revenues and expenditures.
- Allow dollars to follow each student.
- Put the resources in the schools.
- Ensure that students with the same characteristics get the same level of resources.
- Develop an equitable, simple and transparent approach to help schools get better results for their students.

In keeping with its belief that resources must be in the schools, not in the central office, BCPS has cut district office positions by 33 percent (from 1,496 in FY 2008 to 1,001 in FY 2012) and moved \$164 million in additional dollars to schools, resulting in direct school funding increases every year since FY 2008.<sup>4</sup> In FY13, the district took the centrality of individual schools one step further, adopting a budget methodology that allocates money to schools *before* covering other expenses and focuses on maintaining schools' purchasing power. This "schools-first funding" means that the district office, rather than schools, absorbs the effects of costs increases that are outpacing increases in revenue.<sup>5</sup> Table 1, below, shows an example of the schools-first funding approach from fiscal year 2014:<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1: Schools First Funding FY2014: A Summary**

|                                                                                  |                                                                               |                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Step 1: Determine dollars the district has to work with.                         | Total funding from state, city, federal and other sources:                    | \$1,323,228,827        |
|                                                                                  | Subtract Special Fund (restricted or grant dollars)                           | \$ (106,915,003)       |
|                                                                                  | Subtract Enterprise Fund (generated by and used to fund food services)        | \$ (41,336,119)        |
|                                                                                  | <b>Total available to fund schools and the district office:</b>               | <b>\$1,174,977,705</b> |
| Step 2: Set minimum amount to maintain purchasing power for non-charter schools. | Last years' per-pupil amount:                                                 | \$377,518,722          |
|                                                                                  | Add amount required to cover projected increases in salary and benefit costs. | \$14,639,834           |
|                                                                                  | <b>Guaranteed minimum amount for non-charter schools:</b>                     | <b>\$392,158,556</b>   |
| Step 3: Set aside additional money for schools                                   | Initial reserves set aside for all schools and in-school programs:            | \$322,819              |
|                                                                                  | General education locked allocation:                                          | \$81,371,345           |
|                                                                                  | General education targeted funds:                                             | \$2,381,941            |
|                                                                                  | Allocation for alternative options schools and programs:                      | \$17,500,000           |
|                                                                                  | Charter school allocation:                                                    | \$106,060,491          |
|                                                                                  | Locked funds for students with disabilities:                                  | \$106,205,959          |
|                                                                                  | Unlocked funds for students with disabilities:                                | \$83,787,533           |
|                                                                                  | <b>Total additional school allocation:</b>                                    | <b>\$400,529,534</b>   |
|                                                                                  | <b>Total dollars for schools:</b>                                             | <b>\$792,688,645</b>   |
| Step 4: Calculate available revenue for the district office budget.              | Total available funds after school are funded:                                | \$382,289,060          |

Source: BCPS' Proposed Fiscal Year 2014 Operating Budget, May 16, 2013

Alonso has described the basic assumptions that drive the BCPS budgeting process as follows:<sup>7</sup>

- There is a finite amount of money.
- Resources in schools will be safeguarded.
- Research and data will guide decisions at the system and school level.
- Those closest to students will make key decisions about programs, partners, supports and staffing.
- Funding to schools and students should be fair and transparent.
- It is about the students.
- The response to a changing budget picture follows the above principles.

Since FY 2009, Baltimore has made real progress in terms of within-district equity from one school to another. In many school districts, schools with similar students may not generate equivalent funding because funding is driven by a staffing model and schools receive staff rather than dollars. Seniority and personnel costs may therefore produce vastly different per pupil spending from one school to another, even with similar students at each school. In 2008 only 52 percent of Baltimore’s public schools were within 10 percent of the district median dollars per pupil figure. By 2012, 81 percent of the district schools were within 10 percent of the median-funded school.<sup>8</sup> An analysis by Education Resource Strategies compared Baltimore to several similar districts and found it had the highest percentage of schools within 10 percent of the median per-pupil spending of the comparison districts.<sup>9</sup>






## 2. How Does Baltimore’s Student-Based Budgeting Process Work?

Under Fair Student Funding money follows the child. Decisions about how to spend that money rest with school communities—those who know best what their students need to achieve and succeed. And under Fair Student Funding, all schools receive a per-pupil amount based on student enrollment, which is then weighted according to students’ academic needs.

FY 2013’s total allocation was \$377,518,722; for FY14, the district projects that an additional \$14,639,834 will be needed to maintain schools’ purchasing power for staff salaries and benefits, bringing the total amount to \$392,158,556.<sup>10</sup>

Each school receives its share of this total through a per-pupil formula that allocates a “base” level of funding for each student and supplements this with “weights” for students in particular categories or circumstances. Baltimore City Public Schools’ FY14 formula is shown in Table 2, below:<sup>11</sup>

**Table 2: Baltimore Public Schools’ 2013–2014 Fair Student Funding Formula**

|                                                                                     |                             |                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
|  | Base Allocation             | \$5,190<br>1.00   |
|  | Disabled                    | \$641<br>0.1235   |
|  | Dropout Prevention/ At Risk | \$650<br>0.125    |
|  | Advanced Ability            | \$1,000<br>0.1926 |
|  | Basic Ability               | \$1,000<br>0.1926 |

BCPS CEO Alonso believed that the weights should be based on academic—not financial—need. Unlike most districts that weight poverty based on the number of children that qualify for the free lunch program, Baltimore weights both basic and advanced academic achievement. Alonso argued that funding should be determined based on students' academic performance at the time they enroll in a school. Alonso argued that if funding is based on the number of students who continue to struggle over time, then

schools have a financial incentive for children to continue to perform poorly.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Baltimore gives additional weights to both below-average and above-average students.

Academic need (basic) is calculated based on students' academic scores on entry to the school. For elementary schools, kindergarten readiness exams are used as the entry score. For schools with students in the middle and high school grades, prior year Maryland State Assessment scores are used to represent student academic need.

Academic need (advanced) is represented by the percentage of students scoring advanced on state tests. For elementary schools, advanced need is calculated based on the percentage of students scoring at the advanced level on both math and English Language Arts (ELA) tests in grade 1. For schools with students in middle school grades, advanced need is calculated based on the percentage of students scoring at advanced in either math or ELA tests in grade 5. For schools with students in high school grades, advanced need is calculated based on the percentage of students scoring at advanced level in either math or ELA tests in grade 8.

The basic and advanced weights demonstrate how Superintendent Alonso sought to make incentives for academic achievement rather than simply offering extra dollars for disadvantaged students. Table 3 shows that in 2009, 38.94 percent of students were in the lowest academic category, and therefore eligible for the basic weight. By 2012 that had fallen to 30 percent.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in 2009 15.56 percent of students were eligible for the advanced weight. By 2012 that number had increased to 25 percent.<sup>14</sup> It is clearly a positive outcome when the amount of money going to lower scoring students is shrinking and the amount of revenue going to higher performing students is growing—based on higher overall achievement. Overall, there are now fewer total students eligible for either the basic or the advanced weight, because more previously underperforming students have moved into the proficient range.

**Table 3: FY2009 to FY2012 Basic and Advanced Weights**

| Year & Weight     | Eligible Students | Total % Qualifying | Base Weight | Base Funding  | % of Total FSF Funding |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------------|
| <b>FY 2009</b>    |                   |                    |             |               |                        |
| • Basic Weight    | 63,845            | 38.94%             | \$ 2,200    | \$ 54,698,600 | 11.09%                 |
| • Advanced Weight | 63,845            | 15.56%             | \$ 2,200    | \$ 21,841,600 | 44.30%                 |
| <b>FY 2010</b>    |                   |                    |             |               |                        |
| • Basic Weight    | 57,514            | 37.08%             | \$ 2,200    | \$ 46,916,606 | 9.73%                  |
| • Advanced Weight | 57,514            | 18.99%             | \$ 2,200    | \$ 24,031,640 | 4.99%                  |
| <b>FY 2011</b>    |                   |                    |             |               |                        |
| • Basic Weight    | 68,368            | 32.53%             | \$ 1,500    | \$ 28,484,846 | 5.97%                  |
| • Advanced Weight | 68,368            | 22.02%             | \$ 1,500    | \$ 19,276,263 | 4.04%                  |
| <b>FY 2012</b>    |                   |                    |             |               |                        |
| • Basic Weight    | 57,632            | 30.19%             | \$ 994      | \$ 17,297,079 | 3.67%                  |
| • Advanced Weight | 57,632            | 25.28%             | \$ 994      | \$ 14,479,471 | 3.07%                  |

### 3. How Much Autonomy Do Baltimore City Public Schools Enjoy?

There are two ways to view school-level autonomy. First, autonomy at the school level can be evaluated by budget discretion: what proportion of funds is sent to the schools versus retained at the district level? Second, one can evaluate by planning discretion: how much control over staffing and programmatic offerings do principals have?

The letter grade given to school districts in this *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook* indicating the level of autonomy over school budgets is based on the percentage of yearly operating funds that are allocated to the school level. The higher the percentage of operating funds allocated to the school level, the greater budget autonomy the principal enjoys.<sup>15</sup>

Although BCPS claims to give a significant portion of school budgets directly to schools, our analysis shows that this is not the case. Combining both unrestricted and restricted operating funds, only 29.6 percent of the BCPS district operating budget was funneled directly to schools during the 2012–2013 school year. Relative to other school districts that employ weighted student formula, this is a low percentage of funding for principals to have autonomy over, which is why this analysis has given BCPS a “D” grade in principal autonomy.

Nevertheless, Baltimore principals have more control over hiring than most public school principals. According to the National Center on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), the Baltimore hiring process works through “mutual consent between a principal and a teacher. The district gives principals the full authority to staff their schools and makes teacher assignments seniority-neutral.”<sup>16</sup>

*Baltimore has taken major steps in recent years to give principals more authority over both their budgets and faculties. Teacher assignment is no longer determined by seniority, meaning that when vacancies become available, more-senior teachers have no advantage over junior teachers (although nontenured teachers, the most junior teachers in the district, are not eligible for a transfer). Principals are no longer obligated to accept teachers who want to transfer into their schools or whom the central office needs to place.*

Superintendent Andres Alonso was able to give principals autonomy over staffing because the Maryland State School Board ruled that the “substantive aspects of teacher assignment are under the discretion of the superintendent,” and do not have to be negotiated through collective bargaining.<sup>17</sup>

According to a NCTQ study, Baltimore is one of few districts nationwide that have eliminated forced placements of teachers. Even in districts that give principals some control over hiring, teachers who remain unassigned will eventually be “force placed” by the district. In Baltimore the principal decides whom to hire for each position in a school.

Baltimore also ratified a new teacher contract in 2010 that allows individual schools to modify universal working conditions spelled out in the teacher contract to better meet the needs and philosophies of their own communities. Under this school-based option, which will be phased in across the district over three years, 80 percent or more of a school's staff members must support any proposal to modify working conditions, including the hours and days that school is in session.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4. How Does BCPS Support Principals?**

In 2010 the central office improved support to schools by creating “school networks.” Under this plan, 14 networks each serve up to 15 schools, and are composed of four people—two in the area of academics, one in special education and student supports, and one in operations (i.e. finance, facilities, etc.). These network staff spend most of their time in schools and offer schools “one-stop shopping” solutions, which keeps them from having to navigate the central office's myriad departments. School needs that cannot be addressed directly by the networks get funneled through them to the appropriate central office department. The school district has also created a comprehensive set of guiding documents for principals that are updated every fiscal year and provide details about budgeting best practices and other operational procedures.

#### **5. The Site-Based Management of Baltimore City Public Schools**

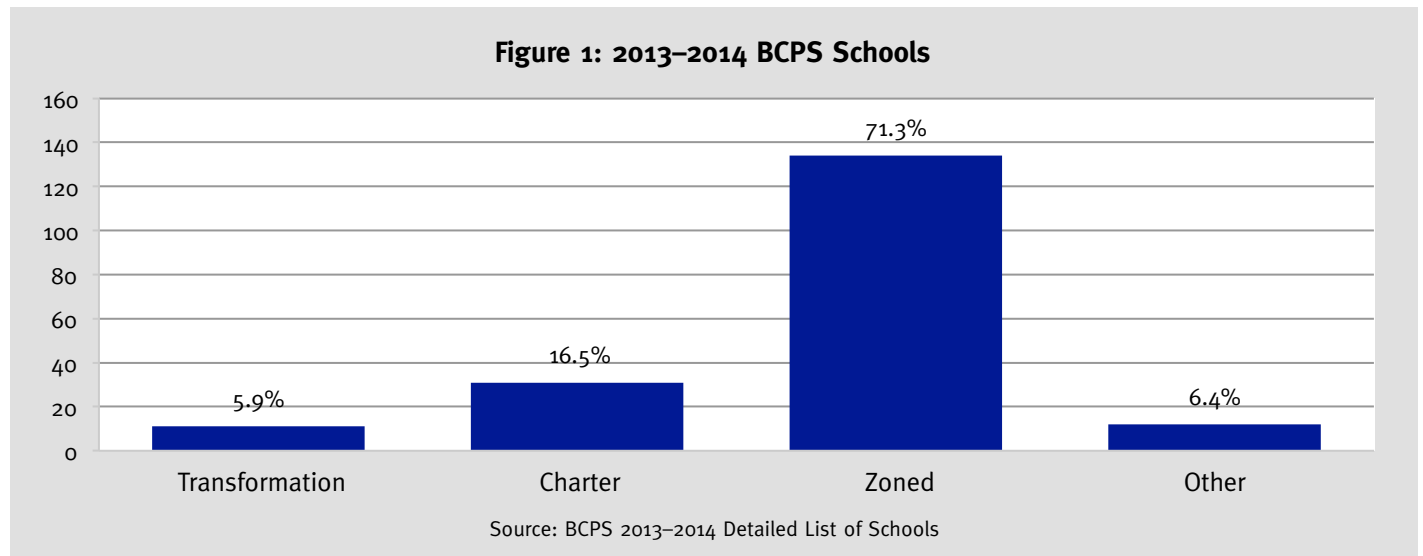
Baltimore parents gained formal input into school governance under a revised policy approved February 10, 2009 by the city school board.<sup>19</sup> The 2009 parent and community engagement policy requires that each school have an organized parent group, such as a PTA, that meets at least four times a year with at least 10 active members. In addition, it requires the creation of a School Family Council that will serve as a school's governing body.<sup>20</sup> The council must include at least three elected parents and two community representatives who will advise the principal on the school's budget priorities. The parent and community representatives will also give direct feedback on the principal's yearly budget proposal. Each school must hold at least one public meeting annually to update parents on student achievement, financial information and efforts to engage the community.

#### **6. The School Choice Component of Baltimore's Weighted Student Formula Program**

The district runs school choice fairs and offers an open enrollment application process for the middle and high school level in Baltimore. The district also offers a detailed school choice guide that describes each



school and program in detail. Students can apply directly to schools of interest and over-subscribed schools hold lotteries to determine student enrollment. In Baltimore, the elementary school level is still based on a residential assignment process. However, parents can apply for school transfers.



Baltimore is also continuing to increase the number of new choice-based schools within its school district. BCPS has a school choice office called the Office of New Initiatives whose mission is to create new, innovative, high quality schools, thereby promoting school choice opportunities for students and families. This office oversees the application process and start up of all new Baltimore City public schools—charter, contract and transformation schools. Since Fair Student Funding was implemented, 23 new schools have opened their doors to students: eight charter schools, 13 transformation schools, and two schools targeted to students with disabilities or who needed alternative learning settings.<sup>21</sup> These schools are schools of choice and have varying degrees of autonomy when it comes to selecting their curriculum and/or theme. Parents now have more academic options when considering which schools their children should attend. Figure 1 shows the number of BCPS schools by type for the 2013–2013 school year.

Parents can review school profiles that include three years of data, including official enrollment, attendance, suspension rates and climate survey information (school climate is described as “the learning environment created through the interaction of human relationships, physical setting and psychological atmosphere”).<sup>22</sup> For elementary and middle schools, the profiles report results from Stanford 10 for grades 1 and 2 and from Maryland School Assessments (MSAs) for grades 3 to 8. High school profiles also present cohort graduation, dropout rates, paths to graduation (the proportion of 12th-grade students in a given year who completed graduation requirements via different pathways), annual High School Assessment (HSA) pass rates, and SAT and Advanced Placement (AP) exam performance.<sup>23</sup>

## 7. Initiatives to Increase School-Level Accountability in Baltimore

Prior to 2007, school closure decisions were largely based on building conditions or enrollment instead of academic achievement, school choice data, or school climate survey information. However, Superintendent Alonso removed principals of underperforming schools and closed failing schools to improve accountability. A recent analysis by Education Research Strategies (ERS) found that since student-based budgeting (as “Fair Student Funding”) was implemented, Baltimore strategically closed 26 (13%) of its lowest-performing and under-enrolled schools and replaced approximately 40 percent of the district’s principals by the end of FY 2009. The ERS analysis shows that the schools that closed had lower average attendance rates, utilization rates, and proficiency levels than the schools that remained open.<sup>24</sup> Since 2009, Baltimore moved 11 percent of students (8,600) into higher-quality schools with reading and math scores that were higher than both the closed schools and the district average.<sup>25</sup>

As part of the school district restructuring efforts in 2010, a new accountability office was charged with developing a data-driven method to better evaluate schools. Schools are currently held accountable for student performance through school-level profiles. These evaluations report detailed demographic and achievement data showing annual yearly progress on federal goals under No Child Left Behind as well as overall student achievement on the Maryland School Assessment, disaggregated by grade level and subgroup. The profiles also report school-level suspensions and school enrollment trends.

Such evaluations enable school districts to assess student achievement and tie principal and teacher performance to it. The ERS study revealed that principals interpret the increased closing of schools as a message that they are to be held accountable in a way they had not been in the past. Baltimore’s recent teacher contract also links performance to compensation and requires a more systemic evaluation of teacher performance that is rooted in student learning and linked to student outcomes.

## 8. Performance Outcomes in Baltimore City Public Schools

In Baltimore, the Fair Student Funding program played a significant role in a set of education reforms that allowed the district to improve outcomes for students and the community. School district enrollment is up by 3.6 percent after a 40-year decline. Student enrollment has increased from 81,284 students in the 2007–2008 school year to 84,212 students in the 2011–2012 school year; 84,748 students were enrolled in the district in the 2012–2013 school year, and it is projected that more than 85,000 students will be enrolled at district schools for the 2013–2014 school year.<sup>26</sup>

While compiling this *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*, Reason Foundation conducted an analysis to determine how the school districts that have adopted a Weighted Student Formula are performing relative to other districts in their state, and relative to each other.

Reason’s analysis grades 10 performance metrics. Scores are determined by comparing the school district in question—in this case Baltimore—with other school districts in the same state (Maryland, in this instance), and sorting them into a decile ranking. Based on the school district’s decile rank within its own state, the analysis then compares it with the other districts studied in this *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*. Finally, it assigns the studied school districts a grade based on how they measure up against one another. This analysis also grades and ranks studied school districts on two other measures: the number of school empowerment benchmarks the district has reached, and the degree of autonomy principals have over school budgets. In determining the grades on these two measures, districts are compared only with the other districts covered in this *Yearbook*. A detailed explanation of the methodology used to determine performance metrics and grading can be found in the methodology chapter of the *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*.

Student proficiency rates, as determined by standardized state tests and student enrollment data, were used to calculate the following:

- 2011 proficiency rates;
- Improvement (average change) in proficiency rates from 2008 to 2011;
- Expected versus actual proficiency rates;
- Improvement in expected proficiency from 2008 to 2011;
- Achievement gap, and
- Each of three achievement gap closure metrics.

BCPS proficiency rate data were obtained from the Broad Prize for Urban Education 2012 District Data Reports.<sup>27</sup> Elementary and middle school student proficiency rates in reading, mathematics and science are derived from Maryland School Assessment (MSA) test results. Maryland high school students are tested for proficiency in English 2, Algebra/Data Analysis and Biology. For purposes of comparison, these specific subjects are categorized as reading, mathematics and science, respectively. High school students’ proficiency rates are derived from High School Assessment (HAS) test results.

In this analysis, 2012 student achievement is mentioned but is not compared to other school districts in Maryland and in the *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook* because many school districts did not have 2012 data available at the time of writing.

Graduation rates were collected from Data.gov based on adjusted cohort graduation rates at the school level for school year 2010–11 (most recent data available).<sup>28</sup> Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates are

calculated by state education agencies in accordance with U.S. Department of Education regulations on ESEA, Title I, published in 2008. Adjusted cohort graduation rates are reported for each school as a whole and for key sub-groups of students.

The grade given for school empowerment is based on 10 benchmarks determined to be best practices within existing weighted student formula programs, as well as the recommendations of other studies of student-based budgeting initiatives.

The following sections expand upon each graded category by highlighting areas in which BCPS performed exceptionally well relative to other districts in Maryland, and to other districts in the Weighted Student Formula Yearbook. This analysis also discusses areas in which BCPS has fallen behind or could use improvement.

## Student Achievement

| Category                         | Grade |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| 2011 Proficiency Rates           | F     |
| Proficiency Rate Improvement     | F     |
| Expected Proficiency vs. Actual  | C-    |
| Expected Proficiency Improvement | F     |
| Graduation Rates                 | F     |

Overall, Baltimore City Public Schools is among the bottom 10 percent of Maryland school districts with very low 2011 proficiency rates in nearly all categories and for all sub-groups relative to other school districts in Maryland. And although there are clear signs of

proficiency rate improvement from 2008 to 2011, most improvement can be attributed to advantaged student groups (White and non-low-income students). Nevertheless, this rather negative overall picture does contain within it a number of notable positives.

**Baltimore City Public Schools have almost doubled proficiency rates in middle school science from 2008 to 2011.** BCPS is among the top 30 percent of Maryland school districts for improvement in overall proficiency in middle school science and mathematics, and within the top 40 percent of school districts for improvement in those subjects among African-American students. BCPS was also among the highest ranked school districts in the *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook* for improvement in middle school science proficiency rates overall and among African-American students.

For White middle school students, Baltimore ranks among the top 30 percent of Maryland school districts for improvement in mathematics. Further, BCPS non-low-income elementary and middle school students are among the top 10 and 20 percent of Maryland school district students for fastest improvement in mathematics proficiency.

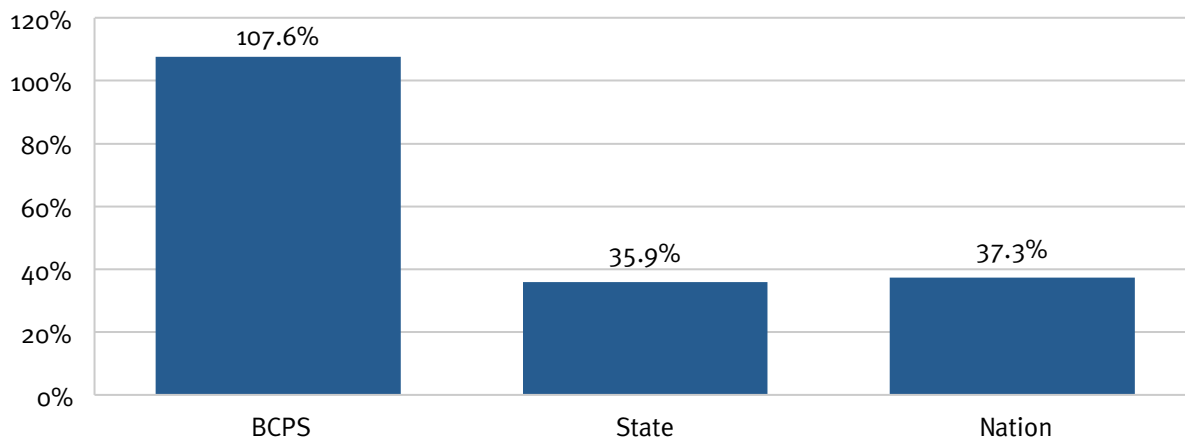
The same is true for reading proficiency among elementary and middle school students. For non-low-income students, BCPS is ranked among the top 10 percent of districts for improvement in elementary and

middle school reading proficiency. However, it still has very low proficiency rates among disadvantaged student groups.

Relative to other *Yearbook* school districts, BCPS is struggling to improve proficiency rates among disadvantaged student populations—African-American, Hispanic, and low-income students. Because grades are based on how the district performs overall *and* among disadvantaged student groups, and not specifically on advantaged student performance, BCPS received an “F” for improvement in proficiency rates.

Figure 2, below, shows the increase in Advanced Placement (AP) course enrollment from 2007 to 2011.

**Figure 2: BCPS Graduation Rates 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Rate (Percent Change)**



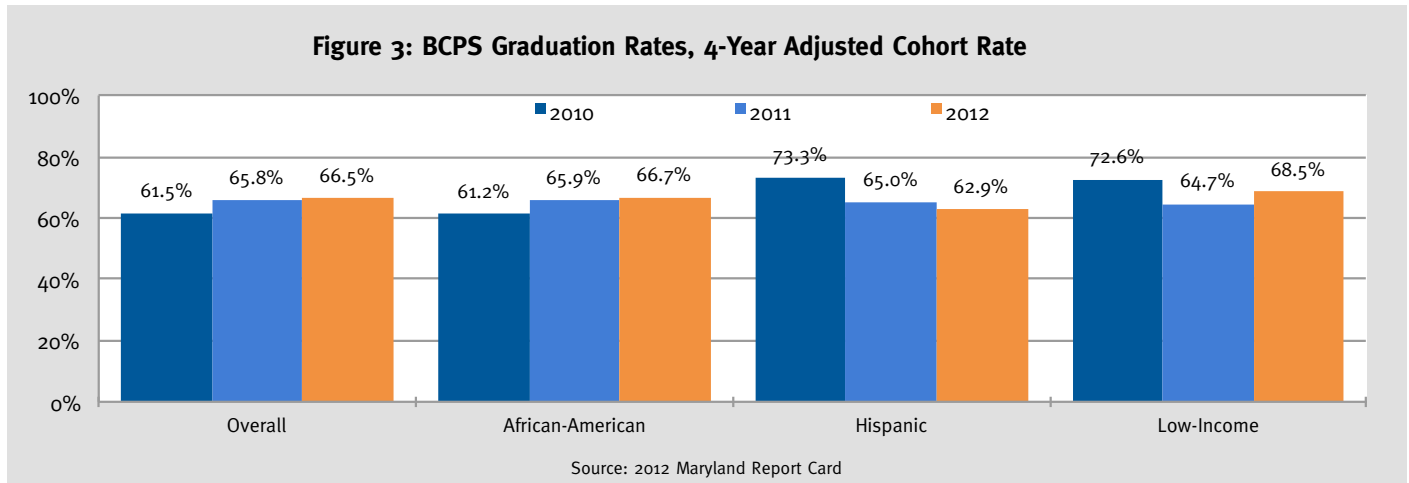
| Number of Exam Takers | City Schools | State  | Nation    |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------|-----------|
| 2007                  | 829          | 38,635 | 1,239,336 |
| 2010                  | 1549         | 49,504 | 1,585,679 |
| 2011                  | 1721         | 52,518 | 1,701,934 |

Source: District Integrated Summary 2010–2012, College Board

Between 2007 and 2011, Advanced Placement course enrollment in Baltimore grew by 147 percent, from 1,188 course enrollments to 2,945. The number of exam takers rose from 829 to 1,855.

**Baltimore City Public Schools graduation rates have improved each year from 2010 to 2012, both overall and among African-American students.** Baltimore City graduation rates are low relative to other districts in Maryland (and other districts in this *Yearbook*), but they are improving. According to adjusted four-year cohort graduation rates, the district increased its graduation rate by five percentage points from 2010 (61.5 percent) to 2012 (66.5 percent), shown in Figure 3.<sup>29</sup> Among African-American students, the increase was slightly greater—from 61.2 percent in 2010 to 66.7 percent in 2012.<sup>30</sup> As mentioned previously, four-year cohort graduation rate data are only available from the U.S. Department of Education for the class of 2011. Therefore, relative graduation rate improvement is not included in this analysis. Although according

to the Maryland Department of Education, BCPS graduation rates are in fact improving among most student groups, the district’s graduation rates are still very low relative to the rest of the state and relative to other school districts in the *Yearbook*.



### Achievement Gaps

The following three achievement gaps are measured across all grade levels (elementary, middle and high school) and three school subjects (reading, mathematics and science):

- African-American versus White student proficiency;
- Hispanic versus White student proficiency and;
- Low-income versus non-low-income student proficiency.

| Category                                    | Grade |
|---------------------------------------------|-------|
| 2011 Achievement Gaps                       | A-    |
| Improvement in Achievement Gaps             | F     |
| Achievement Gap Closures:                   |       |
| <i>Internal District</i>                    | F     |
| <i>Internal District vs. Internal State</i> | C-    |
| <i>External Achievement Gaps</i>            | C-    |

Internal district achievement gaps (IDG) reflect proficiency gaps between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged student groups within a given district. Because internal district achievement gaps assess each district in the state, ranking relative size of achievement gaps across districts in the state is possible, as well as determining how quickly those achievement gaps closed between 2008 and 2011. An achievement gap is considered to be closing if the disadvantaged student group proficiency rate is increasing faster than the advantaged student group proficiency rate.

**Baltimore City Public Schools is among the top 30 percent of Maryland school districts for smallest achievement gaps between African-American and White students for elementary school science, high school mathematics and reading, and middle school mathematics.** BCPS also was among the top 10 percent of Maryland school districts for smallest achievement gaps between low-income and non-low-income high school students in science. BCPS is among the highest ranked school districts in the *Weighted*

*Student Formula Yearbook* in these categories. However, it should be noted that the district's small achievement gaps can be attributed to the fact that proficiency rates are very low among both disadvantaged and advantaged students groups, relative to other Maryland school districts.

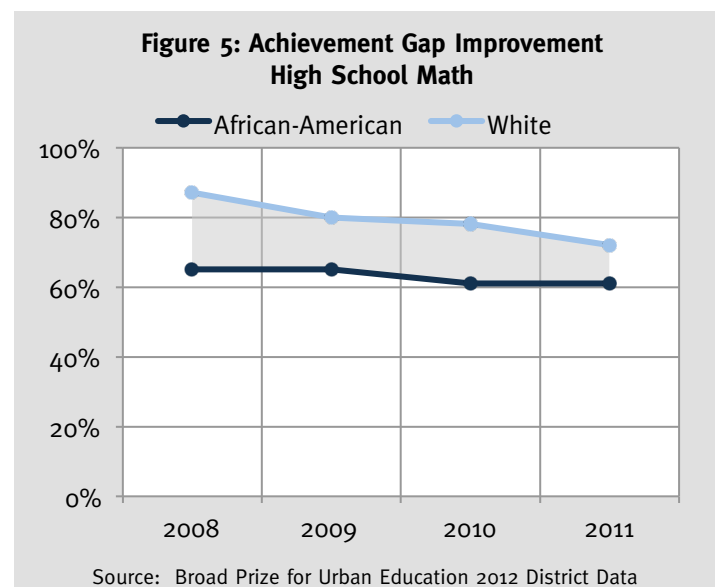
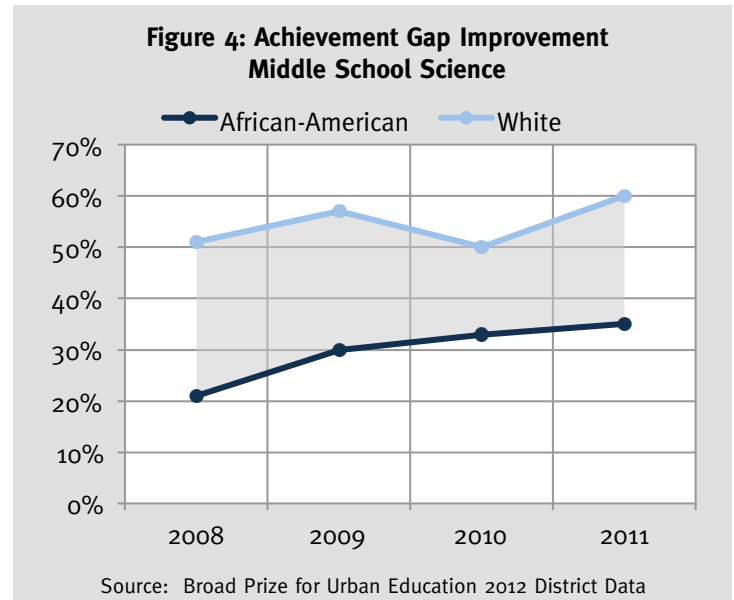
**BCPS is among the top 20 percent of Maryland school districts for fastest closing achievement gaps between African-American and White middle school students in science, shown in Figure 4.** In addition, the district is among the top 30 percent of school districts for fastest closing achievement gap between African-American and White high school students in mathematics and science. Achievement gaps that grow smaller over time suggest that a school district is achieving better equity in education across all student groups.

However, when achievement gap closure is the product of an advantaged group's worsening proficiency rates, achievement gap closure is not necessarily a positive outcome. Unfortunately, this is the case with achievement gap closure between African-American and White high school students in both mathematics and science, as shown in Figure 5.

In addition to internal district achievement gaps (IDG) discussed above, this analysis also measures internal district versus internal state (ID vs. IS) achievement gaps and external district achievement gaps (EDG).

Internal district achievement gaps (IDG) measure student groups within the district. Internal district versus internal state (ID vs. IS) achievement gaps show the district's achievement gap versus the average achievement gap of every other district in Maryland (excluding BCPS). If a given Baltimore

City Public Schools district achievement gap is closing faster than that of the rest of the state, the ID vs. IS gap is considered to be closing. Finally, external achievement gaps (EDG) quantify the difference between a district's disadvantaged student group proficiency rate and the advantaged student group average proficiency



rate of all other districts in the state. External achievement gaps are considered to be closing if a district's disadvantaged group proficiency rate is increasing faster than the state averaged advantaged group. Table 4, below, shows which achievement gaps BCPS is closing, and which achievement gaps are not closing, given the available data.

**Table 4: All Achievement Gap Closures**

| Achievement Gap                            | School Level  | Subject | IDG  | ID vs. IS | EDG  |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------|---------|------|-----------|------|
| African-American vs. White                 | Elementary    | Math    | X    | X         | X    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | Elementary    | Math    | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | Elementary    | Math    | X    | X         | X    |
| African-American vs. White                 | Elementary    | Reading | X    | X         | X    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | Elementary    | Reading | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | Elementary    | Reading | X    | X         | X    |
| African-American vs. White                 | Elementary    | Science | X    | X         | X    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | Elementary    | Science | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | Elementary    | Science | X    | X         | X    |
| African-American vs. White                 | Middle School | Math    | X    | X         | ✓    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | Middle School | Math    | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | Middle School | Math    | X    | X         | ✓    |
| African-American vs. White                 | Middle School | Reading | ✓    | X         | ✓    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | Middle School | Reading | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | Middle School | Reading | X    | X         | ✓    |
| African-American vs. White                 | Middle School | Science | ✓    | ✓         | ✓    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | Middle School | Science | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | Middle School | Science | X    | X         | ✓    |
| African-American vs. White                 | High School   | Math    | X    | X         | X    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | High School   | Math    | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | High School   | Math    | X    | X         | X    |
| African-American vs. White                 | High School   | Reading | X    | X         | X    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | High School   | Reading | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | High School   | Reading | X    | X         | X    |
| African-American vs. White                 | High School   | Science | X    | X         | X    |
| Hispanic vs. White                         | High School   | Science | †    | †         | †    |
| Low-income vs. Non-low-income              | High School   | Science | X    | X         | X    |
| Total Gaps Closing out of Total Available: |               |         | 2/18 | 1/18      | 6/18 |

† Data were suppressed due to unreliability or group represented less than 5 percent of test-takers at that grade level. — Data were unavailable.

**Baltimore City Public Schools is making the most improvement closing achievement gaps at the middle school level.** In particular, BCPS is making the most progress closing middle school external achievement gaps. This means that BCPS disadvantaged student group proficiency rates are increasing at a faster rate than the state average advantaged student group proficiency rates. To put it another way, the share



of BCPS low-income and African-American middle school students reaching proficiency in reading, mathematics and science each year is rising faster than the share of White and non-low-income middle school students proficient in these areas in the rest of the state.

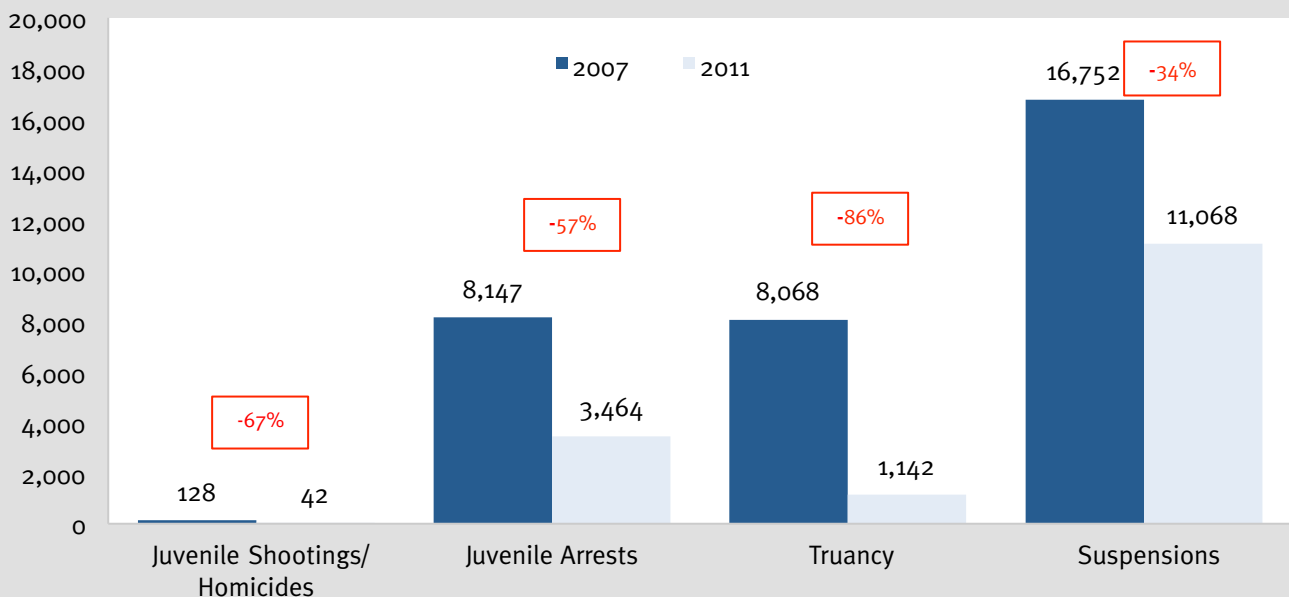
However, achievement gaps within the school district, and those measured against internal state achievement gaps are not closing. As previously mentioned, non-low-income students are showing much greater signs of improvement than low-income students, especially at the middle school and elementary school level.

### Students' Behavioral Outcomes

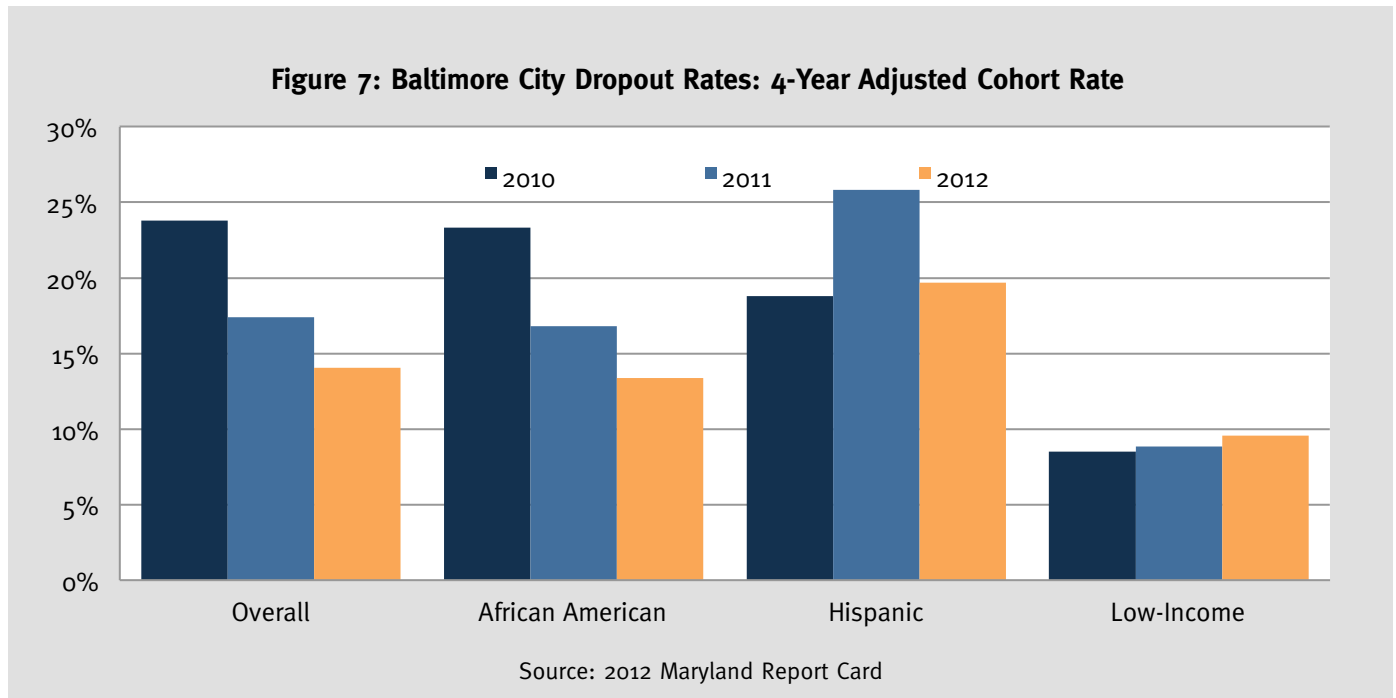
Perhaps the most worrying Baltimore City Public School student outcome is its traditionally high crime rate among district students. Although it is not measured in our ranking, it is important to note that BCPS has seen instances of juvenile delinquency fall dramatically over the past years.

**The most compelling behavioral outcomes are for high school students. Juvenile shootings in Baltimore city were down by 67 percent, and juvenile arrests were down by 57 percent between 2007 and 2011.** Over the same period, dropouts were down 56 percent, truancy down 86 percent, and suspensions down 34 percent.<sup>31</sup> These statistics are shown in Figure 6, below.

**Figure 6: High School Student Behavioral Outcomes 2007-2011**



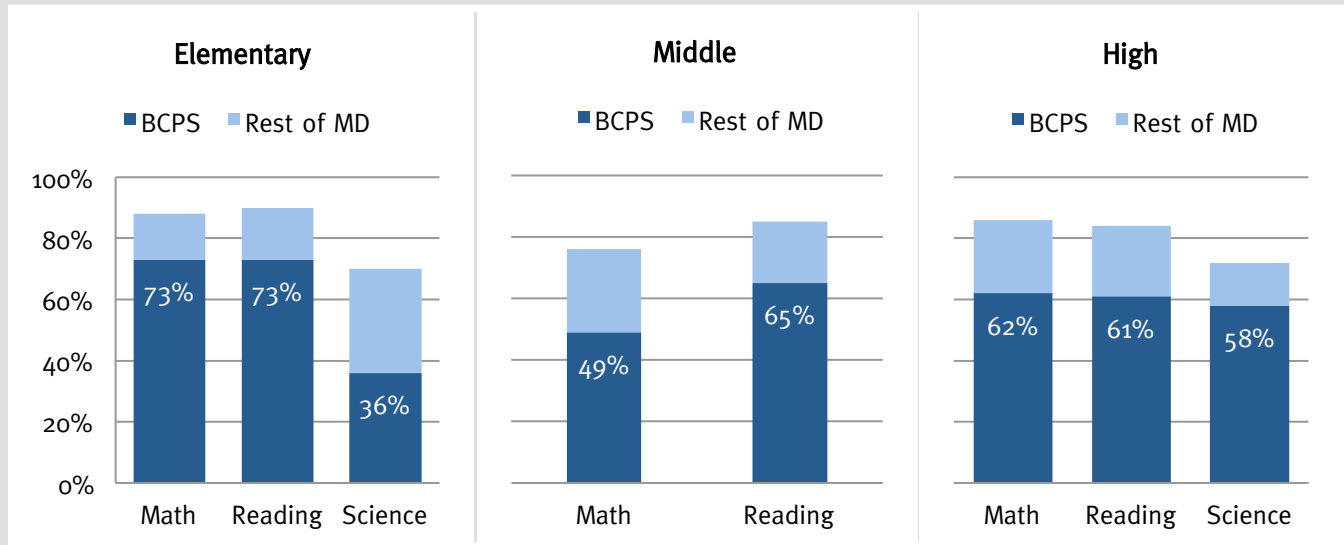
Source: Baltimore City Public Schools



**In addition to decreases in juvenile delinquency among BCPS students, dropout rates, both overall and among African-American students, have decreased by nearly 50 percent from 2010 to 2012, shown in Figure 7.** The four-year adjusted cohort dropout rate has fallen by 41 percent overall, and by 43 percent among African-American students.<sup>32</sup> Dropout rates among Hispanic (5 percent increase) and low-income students (12 percent increase) have risen from 2010 to 2012, but not nearly as much as in the districts overall.

### Areas for Improvement

**Baltimore City Public School System performed poorly relative to other Maryland school districts for 2011 proficiency rates among African-American and low-income elementary and high school students.** BCPS ranked in the bottom 10 percent of all Maryland school districts across all subjects and grade levels for 2011 proficiency rates for students overall and among low-income students. The district also ranked in the bottom 10 percent of all Maryland school districts across all subjects and grade levels for 2011 proficiency rates among African-American students, with the exception of elementary mathematics and high school science. Figure 8, below, shows the difference in the 2011 state average proficiency rate and the 2011 BCPS proficiency rates at each grade level for each subject. For example, on average 15 percent fewer students are proficient in elementary school mathematics in BCPS than in the rest of the state.

**Figure 8: 2011 Proficiency Rates**

Source: Broad Prize for Urban Education 2012 District Data Reports

BCPS also performed poorly relative to other Maryland school districts in proficiency rate improvement from 2008 to 2011. Relative to the other school districts in this *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*, BCPS is among the lowest ranked districts for the following proficiency rate improvement categories:

- Elementary school mathematics, reading and science and high school mathematics among African-American students;
- Elementary and high school mathematics, reading and science for the aggregate student population, and
- Elementary and high school mathematics, reading and science and middle school reading among low-income students.

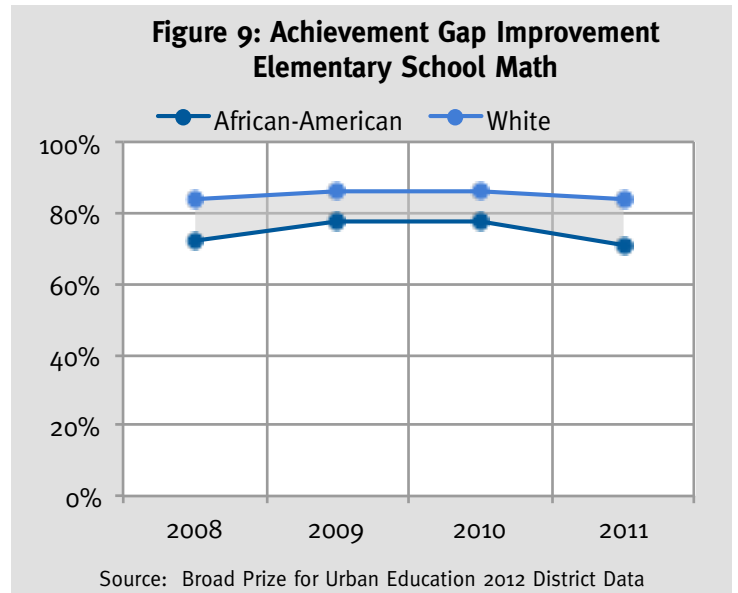
**Baltimore City Public Schools is among the lowest ranked school districts in the *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook* in five of the nine categories for improvement in expected proficiency rates.** BCPS fell in the lowest 10 percent of Maryland school districts for improvement in expected proficiency in elementary mathematics, reading and science, as well as the bottom 30 percent of Maryland school districts for improvement in expected proficiency in high school mathematics and middle school science.

Expected or predicted proficiency rates are what a given school district's proficiency rates "should be" each year given the percentage of low-income students at each grade level. Low improvement in predicted proficiency rates shows that over time, the under-performing real proficiency rates are not catching up to those predicted. BCPS's low scores in improvement in predicted proficiency rates show that the district consistently under-performed and made little improvement in actual student proficiency from 2008 to 2011.

**Baltimore City Public Schools 2011 graduation rates for the aggregate student population, African-American students and low-income students were very low relative to other Maryland school districts.** On average, only 67.1 percent of BCPS high school seniors graduated in 2011. Among African-American, low-income and Hispanic students, the percentage of graduates falls to 66.9 percent, 65.8 percent and 61.9 percent, respectively.

**BCPS is failing to close achievement gaps, particularly between low-income and non-low-income students.** The only achievement gap among elementary school students that has closed since 2008 is the gap in mathematics proficiency between African-American and White students, shown in Figure 9. However, even this gap closure appears to be widening once again as of 2011.

There are no achievement gaps closing among BCPS high school students. And when comparing internal district gaps with internal state gaps, the



only achievement gap closing more quickly in BCPS than the Maryland state average is middle school science proficiency between African-American and White students. This means that, on average, the school districts in the rest of the state are outperforming Baltimore City Public Schools in closing all other achievement gaps.

**School Empowerment Benchmarks**

| Category                                           | Grade |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------|
| School Empowerment Benchmarks                      | A     |
| School budgets based on students not staffing      | Yes   |
| Schools charged actual versus average salaries     | No    |
| School choice and open enrollment policies         | Yes   |
| Principal autonomy over budgets                    | Yes   |
| Principal autonomy over hiring                     | Yes   |
| Principal training and school capacity building    | Yes   |
| Published transparent school-level budgets         | Yes   |
| Published transparent school-level outcomes        | Yes   |
| Explicit accountability goals                      | Yes   |
| Collective bargaining relief, flat contracts, etc. | Yes   |

**Baltimore City Public School district met nine out of the ten school empowerment benchmarks.**

The only benchmark that BCPS has not met is charging schools actual rather than average salaries for teachers. However, while Baltimore technically meets the benchmark of budget autonomy and school choice, both of these elements of weighted student formula could be stronger. Baltimore could bolster school choice by allowing all students open enrollment and continuing to increase the number of high-quality options by encouraging new schools of choice to open.

In addition, there is a strong correlation between district performance outcomes and the percentage of general district funds that are funneled directly to the school. If Baltimore allocated more than 29.7 percent of funding away from central offices and directly to schools so principals controlled more money, it may help improve student outcomes by allowing principals to better align resources with instructional goals and practices.

## 9. Lessons Learned in Baltimore

1. Be as transparent as possible about the process of school decentralization. Baltimore schools CEO Alfred Alonso and the school board of commissioners made a commitment to transparency by making all of the documents and decisions surrounding the switch to a decentralized system available to the community through the district website and community engagement. Every decision is documented in detail and available to the public.
2. Include information on the school choice process in parent handbooks about charter school options. Public charter schools are a legitimate option for students enrolling in middle and high school. Most school districts with open enrollment are not as transparent about charter school options.
3. Incentivize academic achievement and connect the weights to academic performance rather than poverty, as Baltimore has. Low-scoring students and high-scoring students generate additional revenue rather than low-income students.
4. Close or merge low-performing schools in a timely fashion and let students enroll in more successful schools. Baltimore closed low-performing schools and shifted students to higher-performing school situations.
5. Downsize the central office in order to direct more money to schools. Over the past few years, CEO Alonso made significant cuts to the central office staffing model and freed up more school-level dollars for principals to spend at their discretion.

## Resources

- *Board Briefing: Student Weights, Baltimore City Public Schools*, March 24, 2009, <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/news/PDF/BoardBriefingStudentWeights.pdf>
- *Fair Student Funding: Promoting Equity and Achievement in Baltimore City Public Schools*, Baltimore City Public Schools, <http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/News/PDF/councilofgreatschools.pdf>.
- Stephen Frank, *Fair Student Funding in Baltimore City: A Lever for Transformation*, Education Resource Strategies, <http://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/1372-baltimore-city-schools-final-report.pdf>
- *Proposed FY 2010 Operating Budget: Building a System of Great Schools; A Companion Guide for Parents, Baltimore City Public Schools*, <http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/news/pdf/FY2010BudgetCompanion.pdf>
- *The BCPSS Fair Student Funding Plan and FY 2009 Budget Guide to Supporting Documents, Baltimore City Public Schools*, April 21, 2008, [http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/School\\_Board/Budget/PDF/FSF042108GuideSupporting Docs.pdf](http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/School_Board/Budget/PDF/FSF042108GuideSupporting Docs.pdf)

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> “By the Numbers 2012–13,” <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/domain/5>
- <sup>2</sup> Sara Neufeld, “‘Beginning of the Alonso Era’; Just Weeks into the Job, the City Schools’ CEO is Changing How Business is Done With a Distinguishing Hands-on Style,” *The Baltimore Sun*, p. 1A, July 16, 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> Sara Neufeld, “School Board Passes Budget; Funding Overhaul Empowers Principals,” *The Baltimore Sun*, p. 2B, April 16, 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> “FY 2012: Strengthening Schools Amid Fiscal Challenges: A Companion to the Proposed District Budget for the 2012 Fiscal Year, Baltimore City Public Schools,” [http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/Domain/1/%20pdf/FY2012BudgetCompanion5\\_19\\_11FINAL.pdf](http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/Domain/1/%20pdf/FY2012BudgetCompanion5_19_11FINAL.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> “Securing Classroom-Level Reform for the Long Term: Baltimore City Public Schools’ Proposed Fiscal Year 2014 Operating Budget, May 16, 2013, Baltimore City Public Schools,” <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/Domain/74/FY14-ProposedBudget-Summary.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> “Proposed FY 2010 Operating Budget: Building a System of Great Schools; A Companion Guide for Parents,” Baltimore City Public Schools, <http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/news/pdf/FY2010BudgetCompanion.pdf>.
- <sup>8</sup> Stephen Frank, “Fair Student Funding in Baltimore: A Lever for Transformation,” Education Resource Strategies, October 22, 2012. [http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/fsf\\_in\\_baltimore\\_city](http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/fsf_in_baltimore_city)
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> “Securing Classroom-Level Reform for the Long Term.”
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Sara Neufeld, “Schools Facing Difficult Decisions; Funding Overhaul Raises Questions On Distribution,” *The Baltimore Sun*, p. 1B, March 20, 2008.
- <sup>13</sup> Baltimore City Public Schools, Board Working Session #1, FY 13 Budget, March 6, 2012. <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/Domain/6625/20120306-BoardPresentationWorkSession.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> The methodology used for determining principal autonomy is explained in detail in the methodology chapter of the *Weighted Student Formula Yearbook*.
- <sup>16</sup> “Building Teacher Quality in Baltimore City Public Schools,” National Council on Teacher Quality, June 2010, [http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq\\_baltimore\\_teacher\\_quality.pdf](http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq_baltimore_teacher_quality.pdf)
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> “City Schools Teachers Turn Out in Unprecedented Numbers to Ratify New Contract,” Baltimore City Public Schools, Press Release, November 17, 2010.

[http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/Domain/87/2010\\_11\\_PDFs/BTU\\_VotePressRelease.pdf](http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/Domain/87/2010_11_PDFs/BTU_VotePressRelease.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Sara Neufeld, “City Parents to have more Input on How Schools Run,” *The Baltimore Sun*, p. 4A, February 11, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> For more information see the BCPS family engagement policy here, <http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/News/PDF/familyengagementpolicyrevisions.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Frank, “Fair Student Funding in Baltimore.”

<sup>22</sup> <http://schoolclimatesurvey.com/surveys.html>

<sup>23</sup> School profiles are available at the district website: <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org//site/Default.aspx?PageID=21406>

<sup>24</sup> Frank, “Fair Student Funding in Baltimore.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, *Adopted Operating Budget Fiscal Year 2014*, May 20, 2013. <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/Domain/74/FY14-AdoptedBudget-CompleteBook.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.broadprize.org/resources/reports2012.html>

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Education, ED Facts, *Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates at the School Level: School Year 2010-11*, <https://explore.data.gov/Education/School-graduation-rates/5vtz-kvrk>, April 17, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> <http://msp.msde.state.md.us/Entity.aspx?K=30AAAA>

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<sup>32</sup> <http://msp.msde.state.md.us/DropoutOverview.aspx?PV=172:H:30:XXXX:1:N:0:13:1:2:1:1:1:1:3>