



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE-BALTIMORE



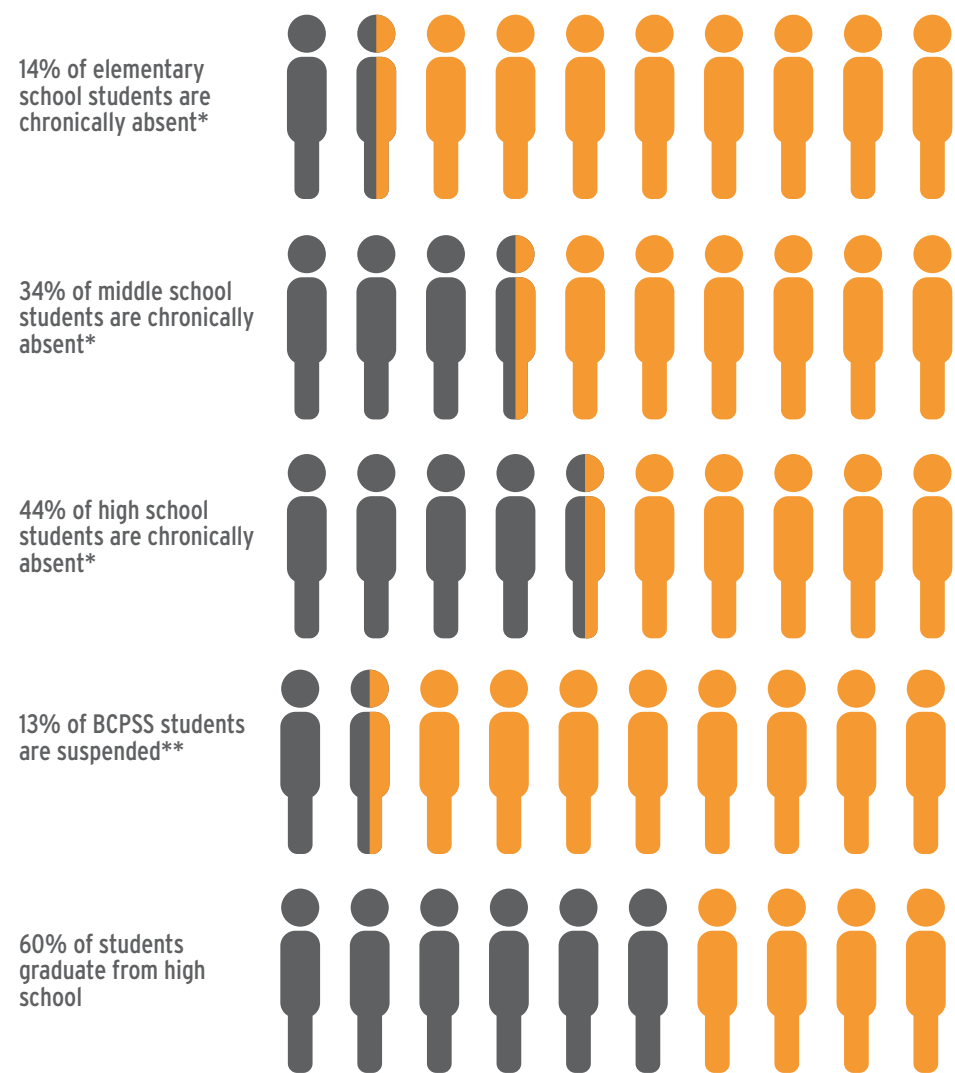
EDUCATION & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

KEEPING YOUTH CONNECTED TO SCHOOL

The reality is simple:

when students attend school regularly, they are more likely to get good grades, to graduate on time and attend college, and to elude the grip of gangs and the illegal drug market. Attendance at school, therefore, is necessary to ensure that young people have real opportunities for productive futures.

ALL BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS



*Chronically absent students miss twenty or more school days – nearly a month of school.

**From a presentation by Dr. Andrés Alonso, Baltimore City Public School System, September 25, 2007. All other statistics from the 2008 Maryland Report Card (www.mdreportcard.org)

Too often in Baltimore, students fall off this important path because they simply aren't in school. Lack of transportation, unwelcoming schools, chronic illness, suspension and expulsion, and a host of other factors pose a constant challenge for students – especially those who are poor – to get to school every day.

Since OSI-Baltimore opened its doors in 1998, education and youth development have been at the forefront of our work. We recognize that keeping children in and, perhaps more important, engaged in school and other learning opportunities are the most powerful ways to help them succeed in life.

OSI-Baltimore's Education and Youth Development Program focuses on creating supportive and engaging public schools, removing barriers to regular attendance, and expanding kids' access to exciting learning opportunities when school is not in session. And in the ten years since the program began, our initiatives have helped countless young people use education as a springboard to productive and fulfilling futures.



WHEN YOUTH AREN'T IN SCHOOL THEY

- are likely to be among the 14 million American kids - including 40,000 kindergarteners - who are unsupervised by adults
- are isolated from school friends and adult role models
- fall behind academically and have to struggle to catch up
- are more likely to become victims of crime
- are more likely to use alcohol and drugs
- are more likely to become teenage parents
- are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system
- are at greater risk for dropping out of school

THE ISSUE

America provides only one youth opportunity program that is available to all children and supported with public resources: kindergarten through 12th grade schooling.



School is the one place where children, especially those living in poverty, have access to the services they need to become productive citizens, family members and workers. If Baltimore's children don't go to school regularly, they are unlikely to get what they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Many Baltimore children come from families with one parent and an income low enough to qualify them for free school meals. Often, they live in neighborhoods that make the journey to school dangerous. Many miss school regularly or don't go at all. Some practices, such as the over-use of suspensions and expulsions, push students out of school and away from the opportunities that schools provide.

OSI-Baltimore focuses on getting kids to school, keeping them engaged during the day, reconnecting students who have lost their way, and expanding learning opportunities to create a comprehensive educational environment that doesn't end when the closing school bell rings.



WHEN YOUTH ARE IN SCHOOL THEY

- are in a safe and supervised environment dedicated to learning
- are surrounded by adult role models who are employed and college-educated
- have books, writing materials, and other learning resources
- can meet other young people and make friends
- learn the importance of healthy routines and good work habits
- have access to balanced meals
- have access to basic health and, often, mental health services
- are more likely to graduate from high school

HOW WE WORK DIFFERENTLY

OSI-Baltimore focuses its work exclusively on some of the biggest challenges facing the city – failing schools, untreated drug addiction, and an over-reliance on incarceration. To undergird our efforts in the larger issue areas, we have created a corps of social innovators, the Baltimore Community Fellows, who work directly in underserved communities.

OSI-Baltimore looks for the roots of the challenges facing our city – and instead of turning our backs on big problems, we dig in. **We believe that systemic change is possible.**

We educate ourselves about the scope of the problem and its potential solutions. We scour the city, state, and country for smart solutions – and if they don't exist yet, we collaborate with city leaders and community members to create them.

We partner with public systems to create lasting change in policy and practice, to take successful initiatives to scale, and to expand public funding. We build capacity among nonprofit organizations and their constituents to build social movements that both respond to threats and shape new agendas. And we work with business and civic leaders to engage them in the salient issues facing our community – issues that are not intransigent, but that respond to well-designed initiatives and deserve our investment.

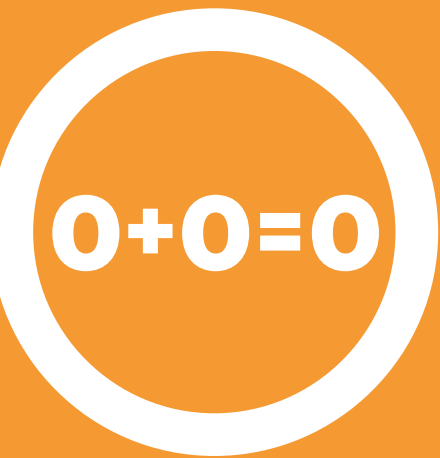
We know that in order to solve complex problems, we must tackle issues on multiple levels. Our Education and Youth Development Program and Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program work together to provide a continuum of approaches – from developing after-school programs to changing school policies that tend to push students into the juvenile justice system – in order to improve outcomes for Baltimore's youth.

AN EXAMPLE:

When the number of children suspended from Baltimore schools was soaring, OSI-Baltimore assessed the data. As it turned out, an increase in school violence wasn't the culprit. Instead, overtaxed teachers and principals were sending more and more children out of school for offenses such as disrespect and disobedience. And when those children were suspended, they fell behind in school, engaged in risky activities and were more likely to drop out.

Recognizing that this was an unattended problem, we brought nationally-recognized leaders to Baltimore to talk about the negative effects of suspension on children. We pulled together the data on suspension in Baltimore and presented these dismal numbers to city leaders. We funded a field of nonprofit organizations that support students, teachers, and school staff by providing alternatives to suspension and expulsion. We were a catalyst for change – partnering with the school system, parents, and community leaders to write a new student code of conduct, which outlines a philosophy of teaching positive behavior and reserves suspension for serious and violent misbehavior. We worked with the Baltimore City Public School System to develop alternative schools and programs that help students struggling academically and behaviorally to get back on track. **And here's the good news: the number of suspensions is dropping.**

These are the landmarks of OSI's work: audacious thinking, integrated solutions, and demonstrable progress.



NUMBERS THAT WON'T ADD UP TO SUCCESS

In the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS), during the 2006-2007 School Year:

- 13% of students (9,854 students) were suspended
- 1,592 of these students were still in elementary school
- Frederick Douglass High School and Patterson High School – two large schools with similar demographics – administered suspensions at divergent rates of 7.2% and 27.5%, respectively
- More suspensions were issued for lateness or absence from school than for all of the following reasons combined: possession of dangerous substances and/or weapons, arson/fire/explosives, and sex offenses
- 26% of suspended students had disabilities although students with disabilities comprise only 17% of the BCPSS population

Key to Success: Reducing Suspension and Expulsion

In the 2006-2007 school year, nearly 10,000 Baltimore City students were suspended from school. In Baltimore, suspension and expulsion are common responses to student behavioral problems, trivial and serious alike. But most suspensions are harmful: they do not teach troubled students appropriate behavior or provide education services and they don't require students to redress their wrongs. Instead, suspension excludes students from learning and other supports, often leaving them unsupervised and more likely to engage in risky, unhealthy behavior or to become a victim of a violent crime.



OSI-Baltimore is a leader in the effort to keep children in school by identifying and addressing the root causes of high rates of suspension, expulsion and absenteeism in Baltimore. We regularly convene educational leaders and advocates from Baltimore and across the nation to spotlight these failed policies and their alternatives. Program staff speak publicly, publish and widely circulate research on these issues.

OSI-Baltimore partners with schools and community organizations that are effective in reducing suspension and expulsion and provides them with both funding and technical assistance to demonstrate alternatives that work. We have also worked directly with BCPSS to change school discipline policies and practices and have been instrumental in revising the BCPSS Code of Conduct so that suspension and expulsion are truly last resort responses.



When the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) committed to reviewing its discipline policies and procedures in spring 2006, OSI-Baltimore was integral to the process. It worked with BCPSS to develop a new discipline code that reflects the school system's goals of creating safe, supportive and effective schools and reducing the inappropriate use of suspension and expulsion.

OSI-Baltimore provided grants to Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization, to provide legal research, data analyses and policy expertise to develop the new code of conduct, and to Baltimore Community School Connections, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering effective school-community partnerships in Baltimore, to provide staff support to the work group that was writing the new discipline code. Co-chaired by Jane Sundius, PhD, Director of OSI-Baltimore's Education and Youth Development Program, this work group developed a new Code of Conduct that reserves suspension and expulsion for serious, violent and dangerous behavior. Most importantly, it emphasizes the need to teach conflict resolution skills, to use restorative justice techniques, and to provide alternatives to out-of-school suspensions so that young people can learn how to behave appropriately, remedy the harm that comes from their misbehavior, and continue their schoolwork.



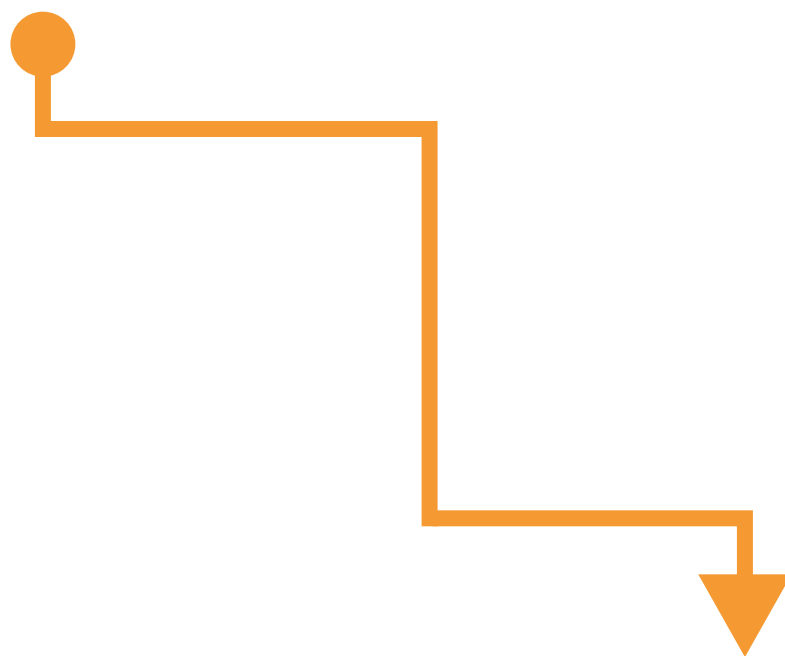
“Our Innovation Schools have cultivated a crop of young people who are very aware of their surroundings, are engaged civically and use their voices to advocate for themselves and their community.”

—Khalilah Harris, Executive Director of Baltimore Freedom Academy Foundation

Baltimore Freedom Academy was one of Baltimore's first Innovation Schools - small, supportive, autonomous, themed-based high schools open to all Baltimore students. With an enrollment of fewer than 250, it emphasizes academic excellence and leadership development. The school prepares graduates to make informed choices, advocate for social change, and serve their communities. Every student in its 2008 graduating class was accepted to a college or university.

High School Reform

Until recently, Baltimore students who did not qualify for one of the selective “city-wide” high schools were simply assigned to a large, comprehensive high school based on their home address. These schools were chaotic, alienating places with dismal student outcomes.



When the BCPSS leadership decided to overhaul these schools, OSI-Baltimore worked closely with the school system and other foundations to identify solutions and resources, to develop communications materials to inform students about school choices, and to invest in programming for low literacy and struggling students. Eight years later, Baltimore students can choose among 24 new high schools that are smaller, safer and more supportive. Most promising are six of these new schools - the Innovation High Schools - that were created from scratch, are operated by independent nonprofit partners and are small, theme-oriented educational environments. These schools have better student outcomes, a fact which has led to the next round of school creation in Baltimore.



Moving in the Right Direction from Innovation to Transformation Schools

“Right now, we have great teachers in every school, but we only have a handful of great schools. We need an entire system of them. But we cannot build that system by making excuses or maintaining the status quo. Schools must be responsible to kids. Great schools happen when everyone in the school, the system, and beyond takes that responsibility to heart.”

—Dr. Andrés Alonso, CEO, Baltimore City Public School System

The success of Baltimore's Innovation Schools, supported in part by OSI, has helped to pave the way for additional small, secondary educational settings. Transformation Schools serve grades six through 12 in small, supportive and engaging environments designed to keep students connected to school during the critical transition from middle to high school. These autonomous schools are operated by partner organizations that offer innovative programs, additional resources and entrepreneurial leadership. OSI is providing key funding to support the school system's plan to open approximately two dozen Transformation Schools in the next four years.



“BOOST is what afterschool is all about: the healthy development of the young mind, body and spirit.”

–Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director of Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign

BOOST: Baltimore’s Out of School Time Initiative is a city-wide, private-public venture designed to make the hours after school safe, enriching and fun for all children. Launched by Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign in 2004 with lead support from OSI-Baltimore, there are now more than 50 BOOST after school sites at elementary, middle and high schools in Baltimore. Throughout the city, these programs are providing children with connections to caring adults, extended learning time, opportunities to engage in activities such as art and debate, and outlets for physical activity that keep kids healthy.

What Happens When School is Not in Session?

The time youth spend out of school is just as crucial to their development as the time they spend in school. The after-school hours, weekend days and summer months should offer all Baltimore’s youth the chance to continue learning, making friends, finding new interests and developing skills. Instead, too many youth spend this time unsupervised, idle or, worst of all, engaged in dangerous, harmful activities.



By providing financial support and technical assistance to key organizations and by writing and speaking widely about the need for out-of-school time programs, OSI-Baltimore has been a forerunner in the creation and expansion of out-of-school programming in Baltimore. OSI staff serve on policy, evaluation and advisory boards with BCPSS and other city agencies to improve and expand after school and summer learning opportunities.

With funding and guidance from OSI, Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign worked with BCPSS to design and implement a program model called BOOST: Baltimore’s Out of School Time Initiative which keeps youth engaged for three hours after school, five days a week. OSI funding is also helping to develop summer school programs as well as programs for older youth that offer paid work, academic help, high-interest activities and social time – engaging programming that helps young people develop tools they need to succeed.



“Sports4Kids has improved not only the amount of healthy, safe, and inclusive play students get in Baltimore City schools, but the very climate of those learning environments. All one has to do is visit a school that has partnered with Sports4Kids to see the tangible effects on how students interact, resolve conflicts and respect their peers and communities.”

–David Gilmore, Baltimore Director of Sports4Kids

With support from OSI, Sports4Kids, a nationally-recognized organization, is bringing recess and supervised play back into Baltimore schools. Beginning with six schools in 2005, Sports4Kids now works in 18 city schools, engaging students in healthy, safe and physically-active play during and after school. The organization’s curriculum addresses the physical, social and emotional needs of children and, with its unique conflict-resolution techniques, has decreased playground conflicts and office referrals and helped students focus when it’s time for classroom work.



“Some people have an idyllic image of what youth do during the summer. But for too many kids, summers are far from that.”

—Ron Fairchild, Executive Director, Center for Summer Learning

What began as a Baltimore-based summer tutoring program by a Johns Hopkins undergraduate has evolved into a national organization devoted to promoting the importance of summer learning, especially for youth who live in poverty. The Center for Summer Learning advocates for universally-available, high-quality summer learning opportunities, generates increased public investment in summer programs and helps to develop and assess programs. With the support of OSI, the Center for Summer Learning helps design and advocate for summer enrichment opportunities in Baltimore.

What Happens Over the Summer?

One hundred years of research has shown that poor children learn while they are in school, but fall behind when they are out for the summer. While affluent children have the resources to go to camp, travel, gain real-world job experience, or advance their education, children who live in poverty rarely have these opportunities. And, in neighborhoods where drugs and crime are prevalent and productive learning opportunities are few, many youth are in harm’s way - rather than enjoying an idyllic summer vacation.



OSI-Baltimore is a pioneering proponent of expanded and enhanced summer activities that provide opportunities for all Baltimore children and youth to develop varied interests, skills and talents, get ahead in school and be exposed to new friends, adults and life options. As a lead funder for the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, OSI-Baltimore provided resources to work with Baltimore City school officials to design summer programs, leverage millions in additional funding and train staff to serve thousands of public school children. As a result of this work, the number of Baltimore children served by school-based summer programs increased from 12,000 children in 2005 to 25,500 children in 2007.



“We realized pretty quickly that our young scholars would make amazing progress during the school year in our after-school program but, without summer learning opportunities, they would return from summer break having lost these impressive gains.”

—Earl Phalen, Co-Founder & CEO of BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life)

In 1992, Earl Phalen co-founded a tutoring program in a local Boston school. More than a decade later, BELL has grown into a national organization that seeks to increase the academic achievements, self-esteem and life opportunities of children living in low-income, urban communities. In 2005, with the help of funding from OSI-Baltimore, BELL introduced its summer program to children in Baltimore and the organization now serves more than 2,000 of our city’s youth.

PROGRAM SUPPORTERS

- The Abell Foundation
 - The Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation
 - The Annie E. Casey Foundation
 - Ben & Zelda Cohen Charitable Foundation
 - The Commonwealth Foundation
 - The Dillon Fund
 - The Foundation for Maryland's Future
 - The Zanvyl and Isabelle Krieger Fund
 - United Way of Central Maryland
- ... and other investors in the OSI Campaign for Baltimore

Baltimore's youth will thrive when they have enhanced learning opportunities during the school day as well as during out-of-school hours.

Now is the time to join the effort to equip all Baltimore youth with the education and skills that will put them on productive life paths.

OSI-Baltimore invites you to make a gift of support that will allow this crucial initiative to continue its work well into the future.

Please join us.

For more information about how you can contribute, contact us at:

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