

Higher Achievement Baltimore: Our Path to Serving More Students 2020 Action Plan

In May 2020, five years after the death of Freddie Gray here in Baltimore City, the death of George Floyd, yet another black man in police custody in Minneapolis, ignited a fire around the world. This killing once again demonstrates that racism lives and breathes within every institution, from healthcare to law enforcement to public education. Dismantling racism will take not only transformational change in policy and legislation, but also daily work on the ground in the community. We must not only level the playing field for black and brown children, but actually tilt it to achieve real equity. At Higher Achievement, we provide direct service – working with deep relationships and a proven impact on learning in the pivotal middle school years.

Background

Higher Achievement Baltimore is at a pivotal moment. Like the rest of country, we are facing a three-part challenge of COVID-19, economic uncertainty and increasing awareness of racial injustice. In response, ten days after schools closed, we launched our virtual program. In early June, we deepened our anti-racism efforts, with 100% of board and staff leadership committing to a multi-year plan. At Higher Achievement, the call to serve more scholars is stronger than ever. Achievement gaps are widening faster, in the wake of COVID-19, as students from low-income communities struggle with basic access to technology and juggle family demands. Even prior to COVID-19, low-income students had less access to opportunity, such as top-tier high schools than their higher-income peers. In a 2017 [study](#) conducted by the Fund for Educational Excellence, it was reported that 74% of high school students who live in the ten highest-income Baltimore City neighborhoods attend top-tier high schools, while for their peers who live in the ten poorest neighborhoods do, only 39% attend these schools. With [gold-standard proof](#) of Higher Achievement's impact on report card grades, our multi-year academic enrichment mentoring model needs to reach many more middle school scholars.

Organizationally, we are facing an uphill financial battle, particularly on public dollars. Our landmark five-year U.S. Department of Education i3 grant has come to a close. The \$4 billion Blueprint for Maryland's Future bill was slated to be an incredible opportunity to secure public funding, but due to COVID-19, the phase-in for expanded per pupil funding will not begin until at least 2023. Given the fact that government funding has made up at least 40% of Higher Achievement Baltimore's budget for eleven years, we will need to plan for a more diversified revenue stream along with our plan for growth and expansion.

The plan described below aligns to structural and programmatic changes outlined in an organization-wide strategy refresh, Higher Achievement 2.0, which outlines a number of changes to accelerate our scholars' progress toward college-preparatory high schools, to stay on the path to college and career success. To learn more, read [here](#).

Primary Goal: Serve 700 more Baltimore City students by the 2022-23 school year.

Pathway to Growth

In conversations with 20+ external community organizations and funders¹, we all agree, especially in our current

¹ Community organizations and funders include: Improving Education, Reading Partners, MOST Network, Maryland Mentor, Strong Schools MD, BellXcel, the Y of Central Maryland, the Fund for Educational Excellence, College Bound, Literacy Lab, LTYC, T. Rowe Price Foundation, T. Rowe Price Corporation, DAP, Venable LLC, Thalheimer Foundation, Goldseker Foundation, Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr, PwC, Jackson Lewis and more.

landscape, that more Baltimore students deserve caring adults in their lives, emboldening them to be agents of social change within their communities and across the nation. Our students deserve mentors who are supporting their career aspirations, helping them to use their voices and fight for the future they deserve. Higher Achievement is designed to serve this purpose, and we are deepening our work to accelerate our progress in this urgent time.

- **Embolden scholars to be agents of social change.** We are adapting elements of our program to empower scholars to learn the history of oppression and racism, find their passion, and elevate their voices.
- **Strengthen alumni engagement so students remain on-track toward college and career.** We need to strengthen systems to consistently support our alumni toward college and career readiness. We can achieve this by maintaining engagement with alumni, providing discrete programming on college and career preparation, and build strong partnerships with high schools to track alumni progress toward graduation and college matriculation.

While we strengthen our services, we also seek to expand services to many more students in Baltimore City. Over the next three years, we will serve 700 more scholars, dramatically increasing our ability to close achievement and opportunity gaps in Baltimore. This expansion will also lead to efficiencies that will drive a 58% decrease in cost per scholar.

School Year	Targets	Fundraising Targets
2021-22	Scholars per Center: 100 # of Centers: 4 Total Scholars Served: 400 # of Mentors/Volunteers: 200 Total Cost: \$900,000 Cost per Scholar: \$2,250	FY21 Targets Government Grants: \$200,000 Individual Giving: \$75,000 Foundations: \$300,000 Corporate: \$325,000
2022-23	Scholars per Center: 100 # of Centers: 8 Total Scholars Served: 800 # of Mentors/Volunteers: 300-400 Total Cost: \$1,800,000 Cost per Scholar: \$2,250	FY22 Targets City Schools: \$120,000 Government Grants: \$200,000 Individual Giving: \$80,000 Foundations + Corporate: \$1.4 million

Priority Area #1: Increasing quantity of committed mentors

Goal: Retain 70-80% of mentors each year.

- **Create a Mentor Recruitment and Retention Plan.** To dramatically increase the number of scholars served, we must also dramatically increase the number of mentors who support our scholars. The first focus will be on retaining our current mentors by ensuring that they are well trained and supported. This aligns with supports offered in the new One Team model in Higher Achievement 2.0. Our mentor recruitment efforts will primarily focus our outreach on colleges and universities, corporations, and community-based organizations where we see multi-level partnership opportunities. We will also pursue networks with the public sector, faith-based communities, retirees and other community-based groups – driven by the connections of our staff and advisory board.

Priority Area #2: Expanding fundraising by 230% to support 700% growth in number of scholars served

Goal: Raise \$900,000 needed in FY21 to have four centers for the 2021-22 school year and \$1,800,000 needed in FY22 eight centers by the 2022-23 school year.

- **Strategically expand advisory board to 15 members and include scholar or alumni representatives.** In partnership with the advisory board, we will align new member cultivation with the needs of our action plan and give opportunity for new members to refine and advance the plan. Additionally, we will add scholar representatives to our board to ensure student voice is at the center of our planning.
- **Secure early investors and second stage investors, totaling \$500,000 by December 2020, engaging them as thought partners in this plan.** In partnership with our advisory board, we are seeking 2-3 early stage investors to accelerate progress in this plan. In the year ahead, we plan to upgrade 30% of existing funders, maintain 50%, and secure 25 new funders by April 2021. We will seek mutual benefit in all of our partnerships.
- **Steward our funder partners thoroughly.** We aim to be transparent about progress toward our fundraising goals, provide consistent programming updates and offer spaces for collaboration. To that end, we will host all external partners to four in-person or virtual events per year, alternating between scholar-facing and state of the organization events, in addition to monthly newsletters, and individual conversations.

Priority Area #3: Strengthen Partnerships

- **Work in partnership with City Schools.** In order for us to expand programming across the city, we will need a stronger partnership with City Schools' leadership. City Schools has already designed a [blueprint](#) and it is our responsibility to collaborate with the district to determine how we fit into the blueprint and refine our plans, as needed. We will build partnerships with the Office of Family and Community Engagement, bolstered by stronger relationships with host site school principals, with whom we will share quarterly outcome data and seek opportunities to refine our program to meet their goals. Further, future expansion within City Schools will be based upon best practices at current centers, including strong principal relationships, size of student body, FARM rates, target scholar profile, and availability of other services for students and their families. We will ask our current partner principals to share about their own experiences with Higher Achievement in expansion conversations.
- **Strengthen partnerships with others in Baltimore education non-profit space.** Higher Achievement is beginning partnerships with complementary organizations, such as College Bound for our alumni, BellXcel for summer support and Literacy Lab for tutoring capacity building. We will also leverage our voice collectively in the city, with the Strong Schools Maryland Coalition, the Fund's Grade-Level Reading Campaign and the MOST network's working group on OST programming during COVID-19.

Call to Action: It has never been more important that we embolden our Baltimore students to fight for the future they deserve. If you are ready to join us – through funding, mentorship or collaboration on our plan, contact our Higher Achievement Baltimore Executive Director, Garima Bhatt Handley at

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