Dear Friends,

These may seem like simple questions: What opportunities are available to Baltimore City youth? And are those opportunities meeting their needs? Until now, however, we’ve had no way to even begin answering them. The Baltimore City Youth Opportunities Landscape (BCYOL) released today gives us a starting point. BCYOL is a collaborative effort, facilitated by Baltimore’s Promise, to centralize, aggregate, map, and analyze the opportunities — programming that is distinct from in-school instruction — available to young people ages 0-24. These data allow us to identify opportunity gaps and subpopulations of young people who are disproportionately underserved, and to think more strategically about how public and private organizations allocate resources, get those resources to our communities, and develop strong programs.

Through the data gathered through the first phase of this analysis, here’s what we found: from September 2018 to September 2019, Baltimore was home to 2,086 programs providing opportunities to support youth from birth through 24, and approximately 92,604 seats within those programs. Elementary schoolers had the most opportunities available (29%) and older youth post-high school, including Opportunity Youth ages 16-24 and high school graduates, have the least (9%). While many of these resources were located in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates, most city neighborhoods had significant gaps. More detail is available in the report (baltimorespromise.org/bcyol).

Of course, assessing the landscape takes more than counting available seats. To really understand available youth opportunities, we also spoke to young people and their parents or caregivers, surfacing six key themes. The groups we spoke with wanted accessible, youth-centered programs with engaged and professional staff, safe spaces, exposure to diverse experiences, and the opportunity to build skills and knowledge. It is vitally important that we listen when those most directly affected by these opportunities tell us what they want and need.

This initial BCYOL report is just a start. Until now, we’ve had no way to know how many opportunities exist, where they exist, or to what extent they are responsive to youths’ needs and interests. Baltimore’s Promise will build on this work by expanding existing data and collecting more. We will soon release a BCYOL Dashboard that will let youth, families, and other stakeholders find programs by criteria such as location, focus, time, or ages served. And, later this year, we will launch the Baltimore Youth Opportunity Index to measure the access our young people have to opportunities that support their wellbeing.

Finally, it’s important to note that we have a long way to go. The report also includes recommendations on steps that will help us achieve long-term success at meeting the needs of Baltimore’s youth, including: the development of an integrated data system that allows for cross-agency data sharing; shared definitions of youth disconnection that will help align and focus local efforts; and an expansion in the number and quality of youth opportunities, particularly for older youth.

The Baltimore City Youth Opportunities Landscape was a collaborative effort engaging staff members in every team within Baltimore’s Promise and data partners citywide. Thank you to the staff of Baltimore’s Promise for your hard work in the engagement, data collection, mapping, analysis, and authoring phases of this important project. Thank you to every partner who contributed data to help us release this report. We look forward to advancing this important work in support of the wellbeing of youth across our city.

Sincerely,

Julia Baez
Chief Executive Officer

June 2, 2021