



# Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women

Baltimore, MD | Maureen Colburn, Executive Director

Grades Served: 6-11 ■ Enrollment: 492 ■ Year Opened: 2009-2010

Instructional Strategies: single-sex education, STEAM, college preparatory model

Student Demographics: 99% African American, 1% Other, 70% FRL Eligible, 6% Special Education

## A Mission to Serve

The Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women (BLSYW) was founded on a simple goal: to give public school students the same quality education and opportunities as their peers in private schools. The school's all-girls environment prepares the young women of Baltimore city for success in college and life through a strong school culture and innovative teaching practice.

BLSYW cultivates strong habits of mind and a sense of community by educating the whole young woman—emotionally, physically and academically. Its college preparatory model emphasizes science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM); fields in which women are underrepresented. Other specialized programming at BLSYW includes small class sizes, leadership opportunities, Peer Group Connection mentoring to ease the transition from middle to high school, a week-long Bridge program in the summer to get new students acclimated to the culture at BLSYW, and annual college visits for every student.

## From Vision to Reality: How CSP Funds Enabled BLSYW to Open

BLSYW was approved to open in 2008. Its plan was to start with a single 6th grade class comprised of 120 students, and there were over 200 applications for the inaugural class. The school received \$550,000 in startup funds through the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP), which was used to supplement the funding for the first year of the school. The funds were used to pay teachers during the planning year of the school, to develop curriculum, purchase textbooks and technology, and recruit new students.

Though the school started with just one grade, the startup funds were not enough to sustain a school. That said, Executive Director Maureen Colburn noted that without the CSP funds, the school would not have been able to open. The startup funds were used for basics as well as bringing the initial staff—six teachers and two administrators—together around BLSYW's mission and develop the school culture. The school received a second \$200,000 CSP grant in 2011 to help align mathematics and English language arts curriculum with Common Core State Standards.

## Principal's Office

All of the senior leadership at BLSYW—Maureen Colburn (Executive Director), Brenda Hamm (Principal), and Heather Skopak (Assistant Principal)—attended all-girls schools. So for them, the school mission is personal. Ms. Colburn helped found three all-girls public schools in New York City during her seven-year term as the Executive Director of the Young Women's Leadership Network. On the all-girls learning environment, she notes that, "I believe so much that choice should be

## IN THE COMMUNITY

- "Cool Women Hot Jobs" mentoring event brings 50 power women to the school each year for a day of inspiration.
- Partnership with Baltimore City Community College enables BLSYW students to take free courses to earn college credit.

*"My school has helped me go out to the community and help others, and to learn subjects that will help me overcome obstacles that might come my way."*

— Cyrena Lawrence, 10th grade



available to parents and families in the public school system,” and should not just be accessible to those who can afford private single-gender schools. “It’s been my career to make that possible for underserved, under-resourced kids.”

Principal Brenda Hamm came to BLSYW as a career educator and administrator in all-girls private schools. She said that the ability to provide this quality of educational experience in the public school setting is, “...an opportunity that should be available to all kids. Why is it that we can’t somehow create that environment for every single young man and woman at least from the perspective of having great teachers, great courses, high expectations, great support system, bringing people together and saying ‘you can do this!’ and we will provide you with a wonderful environment.”

Heather Skopak, Assistant Principal, speaks on her connection to the school model: “I went to an all-girls school myself, and the environment and the academics provided me and with really everything that I have today. And I attribute it to that. So being able to provide our girls in Baltimore with the option of a single-gender school was really important for me.” Ms. Skopak further notes that the single gender model “helps teachers target instruction to the ways girls learn best. Our teachers become very qualified in being able to identify the different strategies and techniques that they can use in the classroom just for girls. We’re also able to look at incentives for girls and what makes them work hard to get to college.”

### Heard in the Halls: Teacher and Student Perspectives



“Here at BLSYW, they promote leadership and sisterhood. And in the classroom, teachers show us how to become leaders globally, and our sisters are there to influence each other and remind each other that we’re going to transform Baltimore one young woman at a time.”

— Cyrena Lawrence, 10th grade



“I learn something every day from the students. I also teach something every day which is a reward itself to know that I have impacted some students’ lives in some way.”

— Atom Zervas, Algebra I and Geometry Teacher



“2016 will be our first graduating class. It’s exciting and scary all at the same time...Being a new school, there’s a lot that has to happen with this senior class. They will actually put us on the map. So, it’s exciting when talking to colleges; and colleges are excited because it’s a whole new crop of students.”

— Paula Dofat, Director of College Counseling



“I like schools where people know me by my name. And I found that ever since [my daughter Cyrena] started, people know me as Mrs. Lawrence.”

— Donnet Lawrence, parent

## STATEWIDE IMPACT

Grades 6-8 have outperformed city and state proficiency levels in reading 5 years in a row.

*“Without the leadership opportunities and training offered to me at BLSYW, I would not be who I am today.”*

— Victoria Dailey, 11th grade

