

# Advancing an Urban Mission: The West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor

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## Abstract

Coppin State University is committed to meeting the educational needs of its urban population and improving the quality of life in its urban community. An institutional pioneer in urban education, Coppin State University is the first higher education institution in the state to assume responsibility for the restructuring and administration of a public elementary school. It is the only higher education institution in the state to locate on its campus a public high school, for which it also serves as operator. The university is actively engaged in preservice and in-service teacher education programs and, in response to the Board of Regents directive, envisions even more involvement in teacher preparation. The West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor is one such initiative. In partnership with the Baltimore City Public School System, the university chose this particular academic focus because of its longstanding urban mission.

## Introduction

This article discusses how Coppin State University has chosen to advance its urban mission by effecting systemic change through a pre-K to 16 initiative designed to increase the accessibility of higher education for low-income African American youth in West Baltimore. The article presents an overview of Coppin State University, its urban mission, and two project components of the West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor.

## Overview of Coppin State University

As a historically black institution founded in 1900, Coppin State University is a comprehensive, urban institution offering programs in liberal arts, sciences, and professional disciplines. Located on fifty-two acres in Baltimore City, the institution applies its resources to meet urban needs wherever those applications mesh well with its academic programs. Named in honor of Fanny Jackson Coppin, an outstanding African American educator, and dedicated to teaching, Coppin fulfills a particularly important mission for the state of Maryland. It is a member institution of

the University System of Maryland (USM), is governed by the University System of Maryland Board of Regents, and has a six-member Board of Visitors. With a faculty of 259 and a staff of 373, Coppin State University offers excellence in academic programming with twenty-three majors and nine graduate degree programs.

Historically, the student body has been characterized as predominantly African American, female, nontraditional, and commuter. The current student body reflects these characteristics. In fall 2005, 4,306 students (3,451 undergraduates and 855 graduates) were enrolled. The average age of the student population is 29. Minorities make up 94 percent of the student population, of whom 99 percent are African American. The majority (89 percent) are in-state residents who reside in Baltimore City (52 percent) and surrounding counties (48 percent) of Maryland.

The university is committed to meeting the educational needs of its urban population and improving the quality of life in its urban community. An institutional pioneer in urban education, Coppin State University is the first higher education institution in the state to assume responsibility for the restructuring and administration of a public elementary school. In addition, it is the only higher education institution in the state to locate a public high school on its campus; it also serves as the school's operator. The university is actively engaged in preservice and in-service teacher education programs and, in response to the Board of Regents directive, envisions even more involvement in teacher preparation. The West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor is one such initiative. In partnership with the Baltimore City Public School System, the university chose this particular academic focus because of its longstanding urban mission.

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### **Advancing an Urban Mission**

Since its founding, inextricable ties between access and public service roles and the effective integration of the two roles have characterized the institutional mission. The university mission clearly defines the institution's purpose within the context of higher education, indicates those whom the institution seeks to

serve, and outlines what the institution seeks to accomplish. The mission statement reads:

Coppin State University provides educational access and diverse opportunities for students with a high potential for success and for students whose promise may have been hindered by a lack of social, personal or financial opportunity. High quality academic programs offer innovative curricula and the latest advancements in technology prepare students for new workforce careers in a global economy. . . . By creating a common ground of intellectual commitment in a supportive learning community, Coppin educates and empowers a diverse student body to lead by the force of its ideas to become critical, creative and compassionate citizens of the community and leaders of the world, with a heart for lifelong learning and dedicated public service. Coppin State University applies its resources to meet urban needs, especially those of Baltimore City, wherever those applications mesh well with its academic programs. (*CSU Office of Planning and Accreditation 2005*)

Coppin seeks to fulfill and extend its access role of providing a wide range of high quality educational programs at the baccalaureate and magistral levels as a means of economic, educational, intellectual, professional, and social mobility for its primary constituency, students whose promise may have been hindered by a lack of social, personal, or financial opportunity. For example, approximately 56 percent of Coppin students qualify for federal Pell Grants, a higher proportion than on any other campus in the University System of Maryland, where the average is around 22 percent. For some researchers the social mobility score, a school's commitment to educating lower-income students, is defined as the percentage of its students on Pell Grants (*Editors of The Washington Monthly 2006, 25*).

Throughout its 106-year history, Coppin's commitment to its public service role has been reflected in its steady contribution to the city, state, and nation, which is a point of institutional pride. As Coppin has grown, its connections with the community have deepened and matured in a way that serves as a model for the operation of urban institutions in the twenty-first century. The university serves a community that is 99 percent African American, in which more than one-third of the households are headed by women

and 27 percent of the residents earn less than \$15,000 annually. The neighborhood suffers from a crime rate among the highest in Baltimore. Most residents are law-abiding and responsible, but drugs have had a pernicious and overwhelming impact on this part of the city (*CSU 2001, 1–2*). These factors only intensify the university’s urban-based mission.

Coppin is an oasis within the West Baltimore urban environment, serving as a center not only for education, but also for recreational activities and employment opportunities. The university is a stabilizing force within the neighborhood, and it is fully accessible and open to the neighborhood. Many urban institutions are almost like gated communities. Coppin’s campus is pedestrian-friendly and inviting, and its ongoing capital improvement plan offers grace from the blight that envelops much of the area.

The campus traditionally hosts a variety of community-oriented events, from high school graduations to summer day camps. Coppin is ideal for these purposes because the campus has the size and feel of a close-knit “learning community” that encourages exploration and public service. Coppin’s location sends a twofold message: education is critical to this particular community’s future and viability, and higher education is within this community’s reach. No other campus in the University System of Maryland embraces such a difficult but essential institutional mission (*CSU 2001, 2, 13*).

Thus, addressing accessibility for those historically underrepresented in higher education while valuing community outreach and service is the underlying theme of the institutional mission. Given the recent findings of the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, the need for such a timeless commitment is ever apparent (*U.S. Department of Education 2006*). Today, with 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs requiring post-secondary education, the commission found that (1) inadequate academic preparation has become a major barrier to college access, particularly for minority and low-income students like the typical Coppin State student, and (2) many college graduates do not possess the level of reading, writing, and thinking skills expected of college graduates (*p. 1*).

### The West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor

In Baltimore, Maryland, and the United States at large, urban-area schoolchildren by the thousands are in disadvantaged educational environments. From the U.S. Department of Education’s No Child Left Behind Initiative to the Baltimore City School System’s

small/innovative high schools project, efforts at all levels of education indicate one point: clear recognition of the need to reform and innovate now (*Consortium for Policy Research in Education 2000; Darling-Hammond 2005; Hawkins 2005*). As stated in *Gathering Momentum*, “it turns out that although everyone thinks of these two systems as separate, they are interdependent. It is impossible to create major changes on one side of the gap (the K-12 system) without significant changes on the other (higher education)” (*Hechinger Institute et al. 2002, 1*).

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Data demonstrate that, in general, many students lack the academic preparation needed to enroll at a college or university and thereby miss the benefits of a college degree (*Mintrop 2003; U.S. Department of Education 2006*).

Conditions affecting the delivery of education to youths in West Baltimore cry out for immediate relief. From poverty and crime to broken homes and in-school failure, young adolescents in the area face a daunting array of challenges. West Baltimore’s school-aged youths share many of the characteristics of their peers throughout Baltimore and in large urban settings nationwide.

The typical Corridor student is an African American child living in a female-headed single-parent household and most likely receiving free or reduced-price school meals, indicating a family living near, at, or below the national poverty level. It is unlikely that the student has met minimum state competency standards in functional tests. Similarly, the typical Corridor student missed one in five school days each year. As an inner-city Baltimore resident, the student faces crime and poverty (at levels among the highest in the state) on a daily basis. As a Baltimore City school student, the typical Corridor student faces a significant risk of not graduating at the same time as peers statewide and is three times as likely as students statewide to drop out of school.

In this inner-city milieu, Coppin State University has resolved to create and develop the West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor to illustrate a university-supported commitment and expertise in reversing the effects of distressed city environments on educational experiences (*Hawkins 2005; University System of Maryland K-16*). The aim is to successfully change the

educational outcomes of such students so they will show substantial improvement in state-mandated achievement tests and motivation, yielding reduced absenteeism and increased retention rates (*Arrington 2003*). The problem is replicated across the nation in comparable urban areas (*Kirst and Venezia 2006*). Therefore, the Corridor concept has had a local, regional, and national scope from its inception.

For nearly a decade at the university, this educational reform initiative has been a work in progress. The creation and continuing development of the West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor reflects Coppin State University's determination to play a leadership role in the critical reform efforts that are taking place today—locally, regionally, and nationally (see table 1). As initial phases were implemented and the concept evolved, the institution's primary goal has not changed. From its early inception until now, the university's resources have been utilized to improve the delivery of effective education to youths in urban settings. In partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools, the university views the development of a thriving educational pipeline as a strategic way of ensuring academic excellence in schools in Coppin's own neighborhood of West Baltimore.

### Rosemont Elementary/Middle School

One component of the West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor is the Rosemont Elementary/Middle School. In 1998, Coppin took over nearby Rosemont Elementary School, becoming the first higher education institution in Maryland to manage a public school. Rosemont Elementary is located in the Greater Rosemont Community, an area adjacent to the university. In 1997, the Maryland Department of Education (MSDE) declared Rosemont “. . . below acceptable standards” (*Battle 2003*). It was the second-poorest-performing school in the state of Maryland. Its close proximity to Coppin made it an ideal candidate for inclusion in the university's developing Urban Education Corridor model. Rosemont's student body reflects the impact of conditions typical of West Baltimore and many Baltimore City schools: crime, poverty, drug activity in the neighborhood; low scores on state functional tests; and high absenteeism and dropout rates.

As operator of Rosemont, Coppin hired staff and implemented a staff development program. During the first years of the partnership, Coppin faculty first steps included the administration of a needs assessment to the staff. The results revealed the need

**Table 1. West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor Model for Change**

The West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor Model for Change implements two interwoven priorities: a rigorous academic curriculum and an emphasis on the formation of character in a setting that allows teachers and students to learn from each other in ways that are truly unique.

Moving students from level to level as a cohort ensures that the chain of effectiveness is not broken. Currently, the Corridor involves a pre-K program, an elementary/middle school, three high schools, including an academy on Coppin campus, and the university itself. The West Baltimore pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor is composed of the following program components: Rosemont Elementary/Middle School, the Coppin Academy (high school), the Mentoring Initiative, the SAT Camp Project, urban education teacher training, parental involvement, the Saturday Academy for Thinking, partnerships, an enrichment program, rigorous academic instruction, health services, and evaluation.

**1 Rosemont Elementary/Middle School**

In 1998, Coppin made educational history when it assumed the management and administrative supervision of the then-failing Rosemont School. Today, the 380-pupil school ranks among Baltimore's top 10% of elementary schools. More than 79.6% of its students are performing at or above class level. The school added a 6th grade in fall 2005 and will become a full-fledged, Coppin-managed middle school by 2007.

**2 The Coppin Academy**

A university-assisted Baltimore City public high school located on campus, the Academy enrolled its first 119 ninth graders in fall 2005. It will add 100 more each year until the school reaches a capacity of 400 by 2009. In partnership with the city school system and with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation/Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, Coppin established the Academy as part of the national effort to "reform and redesign" high schools in the U.S. The Academy focuses on excellence, college attendance, and a global perspective. The curriculum includes the fine arts, character education, and critical thinking, among other areas.

**3 Mentoring Initiative**

The Talented Ten African American Male Mentoring Program provides weekly assistance to students from three of Coppin's neighboring schools: Rosemont Elementary, Lemmel Middle, and Douglas High. Some three dozen students are drawn from the schools' "most socially/behaviorally challenged." The project is funded by the Abell Foundation and others.

**4 The SAT Camp Project**

The SAT Camp, an intensive, content-specific, three-week summer session, prepares students to take the SAT test. The first camp was conducted by Coppin and the Baltimore City School System in 2004. Over the academic year, students and parents are invited back to campus for parent-student forums where they can hear from Coppin State University and College Board staff on the college application process, financial aid, and other topics.

**5 Urban Education Teacher Training**

Preservice and in-service professionals—teachers, staff, and others—are provided professional development opportunities as they work with students involved in Corridor programs and projects. Development relating to the human growth and development stages and academic and social needs of students is provided to faculty at Coppin and secondary schools and to participating business and religious organizations.

**6 Parental Involvement**

Through a variety of venues and activities, the parents and families of participants are provided numerous opportunities to engage in cultural and critical thinking activities that enhance their development of academic, racial, and creative skills, attitudes, and abilities.

**7 Saturday Academy for Thinking**

This project exposes a cohort of middle and high school students to critical thinking skills that broaden their career aspirations. The effort satisfies a major goal of the Corridor to prepare students to think critically and to solve problems. Current participants are from Lemmel Middle School and Douglas High School.

**8 Partnerships**

An alliance of supporting partners provides strength and outreach. Currently these include the Baltimore City School System, Douglas High School, Lemmel Middle School, Rosemont Elementary/Middle School, the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Opportunities for Industrialization Center (OIC), the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and NASA.

**9 Enrichment Program**

Coppin facilities and other resources are utilized to provide Academy participants "a culture of professionalism." The setting includes (1) association with adults with a postsecondary education and strong moral convictions, successful college students, and older peers with model behavior and global perspectives, and (2) opportunities for participation in college-level study and involvement with business and religious organizations and other internship experiences.

**10 Rigorous Academic Instruction**

A Coppin-created planning committee works to ensure that instruction in participating schools and related projects is relevant, rigorous, and focused. All curriculum is based on a committee-conducted instructional needs assessment of area schools. Coppin pilots instructional models for use by area schools, the region, and the nation.

**11 Health Services**

In order to address the whole child and facilitate achievement, three partners of the Education Corridor have instituted on-site social services that assist in promoting a holistic learning community. Such operations provide internships for Coppin nursing and social work students. The Coppin School of Nursing manages the Coppin Health Center, which provides needed health services for the Greater Rosemont Community.

**12 Evaluation**

To ensure that Academy goals are met, Coppin maintains a continuous system of evaluation focused on the effectiveness of instructional delivery, curricular innovations, and management protocols implemented in pilot projects and model programs.



**Table 2. 2006 Rosemont Average National Percentile Rank Compared with BCPSS**

Grade	Subject	BCPSS	Rosemont	Difference
1	Reading	46	46	–
	Math	43	60	17
2	Reading	53	39	–14
	Math	48	54	6

**Table 3. 2006 Rosemont Three-Year Comparison by Subject**

Grade	Subject	2004	2005	2006	Difference, 2005–2006
1	Reading	61	49	46	–3
	Math	64	52	60	8
2	Reading	41	26	39	13
	Math	66	52	54	2

for a comprehensive staff development program. At the time, the school had a high percentage of noncertified and inexperienced teachers, as well as poor classroom management, a lack of instructional strategies, and low test scores. As a part of the professional development workshops and ongoing teacher support organized by Coppin faculty and student teachers, Rosemont teachers could take tuition-free courses at Coppin, such as the Praxis Math courses for noncertified teachers. Interventions focused on Rosemont students included implementing an extended-day supplemental academic support program, the Saturday School for Thinking program, a summer enrichment program, and invitations to students to attend Coppin's cultural and athletic events. Interventions focused on the parents included GED and parenting classes taught by Coppin faculty while Coppin students and faculty served as tutors and mentors for these programs. Rosemont benefited from the university's partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For example, Fish and Wildlife Service staff worked with Rosemont teachers and students to build and maintain an indoor habitat. University staff aided the school in seeking supplemental funding for its academic and cocurricular programs. Most important, however, was the active recruitment of the school's principal, who holds a joint appointment in the School of Education at the University.



**Table 4. 2006 Rosemont Results Compared by Grade to City and State**

<b>Grade 3 Reading</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	46	50	4	54		
Baltimore City	34.9	58.8	6.3	65.1	-11.1	-24.3
Maryland State	21.7	63.2	15.1	78.3		
<b>Grade 3 Math</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	18	64	18	82		
Baltimore City	39.6	51.7	8.7	60.4	21.6	2.9
Maryland State	20.9	54.3	24.8	79.1		
<b>Grade 4 Reading</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	20	55.6	24.4	80		
Baltimore City	34.6	58.4	7	65.4	14.6	-1.8
Maryland State	18.2	58.6	23.2	81.8		
<b>Grade 4 Math</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	15.6	60	24.4	84.4		
Baltimore City	37.3	51.3	11.3	62.6	21.8	2.3
Maryland State	17.9	49.9	32.2	82.1		
<b>Grade 5 Reading</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	34.1	56.8	9.1	65.9		
Baltimore City	41.3	44.7	14	58.7	7.2	-10.7
Maryland State	23.4	42.9	33.7	76.6		
<b>Grade 5 Math</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	43.2	47.7	9.1	56.8		
Baltimore City	46.3	48.3	5.4	53.7	3.1	-16.6
Maryland State	26.6	54.2	19.2	73.4		
<b>Grade 6 Reading</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	20.9	62.8	16.3	79.1		
Baltimore City	54.5	35.4	10.1	45.5	33.6	7.2
Maryland State	28.2	37.7	34.2	71.9		
<b>Grade 6 Math</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
Rosemont	20.9	58.1	20.9	79		
Baltimore City	68.6	27.9	3.5	31.4	47.6	13.4
Maryland State	34.3	46.9	18.7	65.6		

**Table 5. 2006 Rosemont Results Compared by Grade to City and State on the Alt MSA**

<b>Alt MSA Grade</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>% Passing</b>	<b>REMS/BCPSS (% passing)</b>	<b>REMS/MSDE (% passing)</b>
<b>3 Reading</b>						
Rosemont	0	33.3	67.7	100		
Baltimore City	41.1	31.6	27.4	59	41	38.7
Maryland State	38.8	26	35.3	61.3		
<b>3 Math</b>						
Rosemont	0	50	50	100		
Baltimore City	35.8	31.6	32.6	64.2	35.8	37.6
Maryland State	37.5	27.5	34.9	62.4		
<b>4 Reading</b>						
Rosemont	0	20	80	100		
Baltimore City	53.4	14.8	31.8	46.6	53.4	38.1
Maryland State	38.1	24.8	37.1	61.9		
<b>4 Math</b>						
Rosemont	0	0	100	100		
Baltimore City	51.1	12.5	36.4	48.9	51.1	37.1
Maryland State	37.1	24.4	38.5	62.9		
<b>5 Reading</b>						
Rosemont	0	20	80	100		
Baltimore City	41.2	30.6	28.2	58.8	41.2	36.7
Maryland State	36.7	23.8	39.5	63.3		
<b>5 Math</b>						
Rosemont	0	20	80	100		
Baltimore City	44.7	12.9	42.4	55.3	44.7	33.8
Maryland State	33.9	20.6	45.6	66.2		

With these interventions in place, the progress of the students at Rosemont has been phenomenal. In 2000, Rosemont Elementary first graders showed the largest percentile gains in first grade reading in Baltimore City.

In 2003, Rosemont was removed from MSDE's "watch list," as it had "... made enough progress to exit the school improvement program" (Barwick 2003). Today, the 380-pupil school ranks among Baltimore's top 10 percent of elementary schools. More

than 79.6 percent of its students are performing at or above class level. Since 2005, 100 percent of the special education students passed the Alternative Maryland School Assessments in Reading and Mathematics.

Such mission-based, institutional goals are consistent with the mission-based program goals of the Annie E. Casey Foundation: to make a tangible difference in the lives of vulnerable children, families, and communities. With funding from the Casey Foundation, the principal and teachers at Rosemont were able to plan for the addition of the middle school grades, particularly the addition of science and computer laboratories and the provision of professional development programs for its teachers and parents.

Today, through staff development, guidance from Coppin, and a truly dedicated staff, Rosemont has met all seven of the Maryland State Department of Education Annual Yearly Progress Indicators for the past two years. The achievement has brought accolades and awards to Rosemont students and administrators and has attracted some much-needed new funding. The city and state have presented the school cash awards during the last three years based on its tremendous progress.

Notably, the progress is being hailed. The initiative is successful for two distinct reasons. First, as Rosemont's principal, Mrs. Sandra Ashe, notes, the achievement deals a welcomed and serious blow to the ". . . myths that say poor and urban students cannot learn . . . (Our) students are programmed for excellence . . . When they leave us, they can (draw), read, play an instrument, write, and (compute)." Second, the Rosemont Initiative's success provides Coppin officials and Urban Education Corridor planners a new incentive. They are pursuing with new vigor and confidence Coppin's effort to develop a "national model" for transforming urban schools into ". . . small, rigorous, personalized learning communities with committed teachers and attentive counseling" (*Hawkins 2005*).

Buoyed by the progress of Rosemont Elementary, Corridor planners implemented plans to transform the school into a middle school by 2007. The plan is viewed by Rosemont principals, teachers, and parents as the best way to ensure that Rosemont students continue in a setting that provides the ". . . high expectations, . . . program(s), and curriculum . . ." (*Arrington 2006*) to which students and parents have become accustomed. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, planning for the bold step was conducted during the 2004–2005 academic year. Rosemont principals

and teachers surveyed parents and found 75 percent in favor of the conversion to a pre-K to 8 school. Ninety-two percent of fifth grade parents were in favor of the conversion. Grade 6 was added in 2005, grade 7 in 2006, and plans are on track to add grade 8 in 2007. As a middle school, Rosemont will continue under the management and administration of Coppin State University.

### Coppin Academy High School

The other component of the pre-K to 16 educational pipeline was implemented in 2005 after over two years of planning and collaborative work with the Baltimore City Public School System. This initiative was a monumental stride forward for the West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor. Coppin State became the only higher education institution in the state to locate a public high school on its campus while serving as the operator. In partnership with the city school system and with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Redesign Program for the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, Coppin became one of the first three HBCUs to receive the Gates/Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund grant to redesign high schools. The Coppin Academy High School model is part of a national effort to reform and redesign high schools in the United States. The Academy focuses on excellence, college readiness, college attendance, and a global perspective. The curriculum includes the fine arts, character education, and critical thinking, among other areas.

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With its opening in July 2005, the Coppin Academy High School #432, like Rosemont Elementary/Middle School, became a vital Corridor component. The high school design calls for the admission of 100 ninth graders each year until its maximum capacity of 400 in grades 9 to 12 is reached in 2009. However, responding to the community’s cry for an alternative to the spiraling decline in attendance, retention, and graduation rates across the city’s neighborhood high schools, administrators yielded and admitted 119 ninth graders rather than the anticipated 100-pupil cohort.

The Coppin Academy is a citywide high school. Admission is determined by a student lottery administered by the Baltimore City Public Schools Office of Student Placement. There are no other admission criteria. For the past selection cycle, the Coppin Academy received the highest number of applications for entry among the city's small/innovative high schools and the second-highest number of applications among Baltimore City Public School System high schools. In 2005, there were over 1400 applications for the 100 spaces.

For the Legacy Class of 2009, 100 percent of the Coppin Academy students are African American, and 82 percent of the cohort qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, a major indicator of poverty. All in the first cohort completed the three-hour College Board Preliminary SAT Scoring Service (PSSS), a formal predictor of success on the SAT. Only three other high schools in Baltimore took this exam. Academy students achieved a median score at the 32nd percentile; that is, 32 percent scored at or near the median in reading and mathematics. Fifty percent scored below the satisfactory level, and 18 percent scored above the average. These percentiles serve as benchmarks for planned educational interventions to ensure that steady progress is made toward college readiness goals.

The success of the Coppin Academy is a key indicator that the Corridor is achieving its goals and objectives. During its inaugural year, 2005–2006, the Legacy Class of 2009, so named by teachers and principal for the first cohort of ninth graders and future graduating class, achieved the highest attendance rate in the city, 93.5 percent. The attendance rate compares with average rates of 82.7 percent for all Baltimore City high schools and 88 percent for Baltimore City's seven small/innovative high schools.

Features of the Academy model include an advisory program, a college preparatory curriculum, a character education program, critical thinking skills integrated into the curriculum, uniform compliance, a debate team, a study abroad program, required foreign language study, and a chess club. A four-week Summer Prep Orientation Program each July prepares incoming ninth graders for life on a college campus. Students have responded enthusiastically to the Academy's unique curriculum as well as the cultural and social attributes that come with being enrolled in a university-assisted high school located on a college campus. Coppin Academy principal Mr. William Howard notes, "I want them to be good people, well rounded, conscious of their heritage and able to speak to the homeless or to dignitaries with equal respect" (*Hawkins 2005*).

Additionally, the university's resources have been made available to the Academy students. For example, university faculty serve as curriculum advisers, master teachers, and teachers of drama, sculpture, music, dance, and physical education classes. Coppin students act as mentors and tutors. Coppin Academy is a methods and practice teaching site for preservice School of Education candidates. Plans are in place for Academy students to enroll in college courses over the next year. Both Rosemont and Academy students often attend university cultural events and cocurricular programs such as Fanny Jackson Coppin Day, Fall Convocation, campus plays, and other performing arts productions.

## Conclusion

Over the past decade, Coppin State University has renewed its commitment to its urban mission and resolved to rededicate itself to reversing the education ills of African American youth of the city. Its primary mission-driven institutional goal, to use the university's resources to provide access and services to its surrounding community, is of paramount importance to Coppin faculty and students. The West Baltimore Pre-K to 16 Urban Education Corridor advances the university's urban mission with two interwoven imperatives: a rigorous academic curriculum and an emphasis on the formation of character in a small, personalized setting that allows committed teachers and students to learn from each other in ways that are truly unique. The Coppin State University 106-year-old legacy of marrying access to higher education and outreach to the West Baltimore community lives on.

Today, the Urban Education Corridor is a thriving complex of initiatives, partnerships, programs, projects, and activities that demonstrate two things clearly: educational reform is achievable, and effective reform pays high dividends. The Coppin State University community is encouraged by the success the Corridor has achieved. In a relatively short time, hundreds of children have excelled. Their improved test scores demonstrate that we have opened a small window into a large world of new achievement possibilities.

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