

## The Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School Baltimore, MD



**The Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School in Baltimore** has over 95 percent of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. Since becoming a community school in 2011, they have seen their school readiness scores rise. Teachers and staff made over 100 home visits last year and over 200 teachers and staff participated in trauma-informed behavior management skills trainings through the school’s partnership with the University of Maryland Baltimore, School of Social Work.

Demographics	Results
<p>Location: Baltimore, MD Grade Levels: Pre-K - 5 Number of Students: 467 Race/Ethnicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>African American 95%</li> </ul> <p>ELL Students: n/a Special Education: 21.2% Free/Reduced Lunch: 95%</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Readiness scores increased from 58.2% to 79.4% last school year</li> <li>School staff and partners made over 100 home visits last school year</li> <li>HSCT received the Mayor’s award for the greatest reduction of students at-risk for chronic absenteeism</li> <li>From 2010 to 2012, there was a 11.8% drop in infant mortality rates</li> <li>HSCT trained over 200 teachers, staff in trauma-informed behavior management skills</li> </ul>

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## **The Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School**

Henriette Taylor has only been the community school coordinator at The Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School (HSCT) in Baltimore for a little over a year, but she already works hard to make sure the school's "467 amazing little souls" understand the legacy behind the school they attend.

She reminds them to always include "Historic" before the name of the school, which honors a famous English composer and is also where Thurgood Marshall—the nation's first African-American Supreme Court justice—began his education.

"Sometimes those beautiful stories, those hard-fought battles are forgotten," Taylor says. "Knowing your history often defines where you go."

Working alongside Principal Kelvin Bridgers, who is also new to the school, Taylor is focusing on re-creating the school as a place where staff and partners surround students and families with a seamless web of supports and learning opportunities. "School isn't just school," she says.

HSCT is one of four community schools that are part of an effort at the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) School of Social Work called Promise Heights. A place-based initiative, Promise Heights focuses on the West Baltimore neighborhood of Upton/Druid Heights, which is about a mile from the campus. Promise Heights requires that all their community school coordinators be licensed social workers, because of the community's great need for mental health and social support services. Many of the school's students live in the McCulloh Homes public housing development directly across the street. The School Family Council (SFC) at HSCT is the leadership team through which parents, administration, teachers, partners, and mental health providers interact and set a direction for the school. The SFC conducted interviews during the principal hiring process and decided on how partnerships will best benefit the school and families.

Services and partnerships focus not only on students at HSCT and the other schools, but also reach out to residents of the area, using the school as the central location to access resources. Because of the work of Promise Heights and the involvement of a local church, a satellite WIC office will soon be in the neighborhood, and Taylor will soon be able to help residents apply for or renew social service benefits. Families also have access to the *B'more for Healthy Babies* program, which was Promise Heights' initial intervention in the community and has helped decrease teen pregnancy and infant mortality rates.

“We try to emulate this idea of a pipeline of services,” says Rachel Donegan, the program director of Promise Heights at UMB. “When you show up in pre-K, I know you as a family and I know what issues you have.”

In addition to Taylor as the coordinator, a second social worker was hired by Promise Heights to work in partnership with the Judy Center (the name for Maryland’s early-childhood community outreach and education program), and focus especially on social-emotional learning. Teachers and other staff members have also received training in “trauma-informed” behavior management, which Donegan says has helped to create a calmer, less chaotic environment in the school.

As the name of the initiative hints, Promise Heights also received a U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhood planning grant in 2012. The Promise Neighborhoods program focuses on improving both education outcomes and conditions in which families live, which Donegan says, can be reached through the infrastructure that a community school provides. “I could fill HSCT with Ph.D.s to teach kids to read, but if I ignore the neighborhood, you still have the families and the traumas that they have,” she says.

As an important part of her coordinator role, Taylor has been working on building trust with families and making sure they know there are services available to help them and help their children get to school every day. For example, doctors and nurses from the UMB’s School of Medicine and School of Nursing volunteered their time to provide vaccinations so students wouldn’t miss school. Staff members and UMB graduate-level social work interns conduct home visits to families whose children are chronically absent and work with partners to address issues, such as a lack of school uniforms or an inability to pay utility bills. Between school years 2013 and 2014, the percentage of students who were chronically absent decreased from 25 percent to 10.7 percent. Increasing attendance is also leading to stronger performance on the Maryland Model for School Readiness with scores increasing from 58.2 percent of young children having the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten to almost 80 percent.

“It’s the relationships that causes the results,” Taylor says.

Parents of young children, birth through age five, are also getting support in understanding and fostering their children’s development through Promise Heights’ Parent University initiative. Seven cohorts of parents have participated and many go on to be parent leaders and facilitate sessions for the next cohort of parents. Social work interns lead mom’s groups to help parents work through challenges they are facing. But that is just one way that UMB is involved with the school. HSCT is a well-developed example of how children and families can benefit from a community school-university partnership.

Nursing students teach families about asthma, host “health learning parties” for young children and their parents, and mentor girls in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Pharmacy students provide tutoring in math and science. Law students hold clinics for neighborhood residents on landlord-tenant issues, small claims, and other matters. Dental students provide services and education, and medical students have provided lessons on nutrition and obesity in partnership with Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL), the school’s after-school provider.

As part of the Family League’s citywide community school initiative, HSCT also became part of ExpandedED, a network of schools in Baltimore, New Orleans and mostly New York City, that provide expanded learning and enrichment opportunities that are closely linked to the academic skills students are building during the typical school day. At HSCT, 120 children participate in after-school programs.

Partnerships created through community schools often lead to projects and ongoing benefits that are beyond what those involved originally imagined. This was the case when the school was awarded a playground equipment grant from *KaBOOM!*, which engages corporate partners to build a playground in one day. HSCT’s partner was Baltimore-based Laureate Education, which operates both campus and online universities across the world and owns Sylvan Learning. Until the grant, the Upton/Druid Heights neighborhood didn’t have a playground. In June 2014, over 300 community, university, and corporate volunteers built a 4,000 sq. ft. playground which has become a gathering point for families. Several of the volunteers, especially those from Walden University, enjoyed the experience so much that they asked for more ways to help. The school was in need of a space for parents and community members to gather, so the volunteers cleaned up and refurbished the school’s basement with fresh paint, new flooring and supplies. The school has also received a new \$1 million library as part of a Weinberg Foundation project to develop libraries in 24 low-income Baltimore schools.

Taylor works with teachers to determine how partners can fill gaps and provide students with additional academic support. Reading Partners, for example, provides tutors to work one-on-one with students during the school day. And the school partnered with the Pearlstone Center Retreat and Farm to give 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders an enrichment experience working with animals and learning about harvesting and cooking produce grown on the farm.

In late April 2015, protests and civil unrest brought more chaos to West Baltimore, after the death of Freddie Gray. Upton/Druid Heights lost grocery stores and pharmacies to fires and looting and the neighborhood was flooded with national media, organizing groups, and protestors. Not surprisingly, families and students were anxious, angry, and fearful. Taylor and Principal Bridgers brought together related service partners to provide mental health support for students during the school day. Teachers were able to refer a student to a “Time Out Room” where he/she could talk, draw, and express his/her feelings in an appropriate and healthy way. Promise Heights staff at all four

schools worked with other community partners to host food drop offs, provide prescription assistance, and connect to legal support. Promise Heights also sponsored a community conversation where over 65 residents, partners, clergy, and school staff came together for healing, connection, and conversation.

“I feel good about what we’ve done, but there is so much to do,” Donegan says. Her future hopes for Upton/Druid Heights are that even if a family has to move into McCulloh homes for a while, they would have a “healthy functioning neighborhood and a healthy functioning school. We see the community school as integral to that process.”