

# What's working across the Cradle to Career Network

## Outcome: Employment



**Essential Question:** Are there quality pathways for students who pursue career training that lead to employment in quality jobs?

**Indicator:** CTE pathways concentration, participation in work-based learning, expenditures on workforce development programs, employment in a quality job and access to ongoing career skills development

## The Factors

In Baltimore, employment is a key pathway to economic mobility, yet access to stable, family-supporting jobs remains uneven. Recent data shows that 61.1% of young adults ages 16-24 were employed in 2022-23, a rate that has remained steady for the past three years. This stability offers a promising foundation, but it also masks a critical transition gap. While many young adults eventually connect to the workforce, 21% of Baltimore City Public Schools graduates in the class of 2020 were disconnected from both employment and education by the fall after high school.

[Baltimore's Promise](#), the city's cradle-to-career partnership, plays a central role in both understanding these trends and shaping solutions. As Baltimore's backbone organization, Baltimore's Promise brings together the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) and other public agencies, City Schools, workforce partners, community organizations and employers to analyze data, identify structural barriers and design strategies that improve youth outcomes from early childhood through early adulthood. Their dual role at the city and state levels helps illuminate why employment disparities persist and ensures that solutions are informed by both local experience and statewide learning.

Young people who experience early disconnection are less likely to secure stable work over time. In Baltimore, those disconnected graduates eventually earn a median income of just under \$15,000 annually, far below what is needed to achieve self-sufficiency.

Baltimore's Promise works alongside local leaders to use data and strengthen governance in support of stronger employment pathways. In Baltimore, this work advances a shared community result that ensures every young person has a clear, supported path to stable employment.

## The Strategies

In response to high rates of post-high school disconnection and unequal access to stable employment in Baltimore, Baltimore's Promise created Grads2Careers (G2C) — a citywide partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools and the Mayor's Office of Employment Development. It connects recent Baltimore City Public Schools graduates (or Maryland GED recipients) who are not planning to enroll full-time in college with free occupational skills training, industry-recognized credentials, job placement services and wraparound supports in high-growth fields, helping them secure career-track jobs and remain connected as they navigate early career transitions.

Expanding on the demonstrated success of Grads2Careers, Baltimore's Promise recently launched CareerBound, a youth career pathways system that aligns schools, the workforce system, training providers and employers citywide. Driven by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, a state law that helps students prepare for college and careers and supports learning on the job, and a statewide push and a call statewide for youth apprenticeships, CareerBound centers coordinated, high-quality occupational training routes, including Grads2Careers and in-school registered youth apprenticeships.

Baltimore's Promise used CareerBound's first competitive funding cycle to strengthen its existing investment in employer-connected pathways. Through this cycle, \$1.3 million was awarded to 11 training providers, supporting 325 funded slots, including 116 federally funded youth training opportunities, with a required year of post-placement retention support.

By pairing funding with retention requirements and training that connects students to employers, these investments addressed both immediate workforce entry and longer-term employment stability. This ensures that public and philanthropic dollars lead to sustained employment, while providing Baltimore's young people with the support they need to stay connected from high school through postsecondary training and into family-sustaining careers.

## The Impact

The alignment of CareerBound and Grads2Careers are producing measurable and meaningful results for young people across Baltimore. Employment has remained steady at around 61%, providing a strong base for growth as new pathways expand. In-School Youth Apprenticeship opportunities have grown significantly, creating clearer entry points into high-demand industries and increasing the number of young people gaining hands-on experience tied to real jobs.

These apprenticeships expanded from 2 apprentices to in 2023 to 47 in 2025, with more than 150 projected for 2026. The Healthcare Apprenticeship Pilot recruited 128 youth, with 117 completing boot camp, 50 earning CNA licensure and 100 entering registered apprenticeships. Employers co-designed competencies, mentoring structures and onboarding processes, creating a strong model for future expansion across industries. And now apprentices are co-leading the way to program sustainability, joining Baltimore's Promise in Annapolis during the 2026 legislative season to advocate for system-level support for stronger employer incentives.

Grads2Careers also continues to show strong economic impact. In one recent cycle, 159 participants generated \$5.6 million in wages, demonstrating a strong return on investment: for every \$1 invested in Grads2Careers, youth earned \$2.81 in annual wages. Earlier evaluations found that 76% of participants who completed training secured employment, enrolled in college or achieved another positive outcome.

In a recent analysis using the Maryland Longitudinal Data System, researchers from Baltimore's Promise and the Johns Hopkins University Center for Adolescent Health found that completing Grads2Careers was associated with a wage increase of \$2,073. These findings highlight the critical importance of sector alignment: completers who secure a job in their field of training see the impact of Grads2Careers increase to \$3,522.

This 'in-field' success is a cornerstone of CareerBound, which prioritizes employer commitments to hire graduates directly into high-growth industries. Systems that once operated separately now share goals, data and aligned strategies. Youth have stronger supports, clearer pathways and more opportunities to earn credentials and access careers that match their ambitions. Most importantly, Baltimore's Promise is demonstrating what becomes possible when statewide policy and local innovation come together so young people gain the tools, resources and opportunities they need to build meaningful, self-sustaining futures.

## Strategies Creating Impact



**Career Pathways System** > Aligns schools, training providers and employers to create clear routes into high-demand careers



**Occupational Skills Training** > Provides training and supports that prepare graduates for credentialed, family-sustaining jobs



**Youth Apprenticeships** > Paid, hands-on learning aligned to careers