



Education Advocate

May 30, 2018

Maryland



## OPENING DAY AT THE NEW DOROTHY I. HEIGHT ELEMENTARY

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21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and other community advocates joined Principal Hanson in early April to open the doors to Dorothy I. Height Elementary, formerly known as John Eager Howard. This culminating event was years of hard and collaborative work in the making.

*"This building brings life to us all."*

*-Ms. Schley, Student & Teacher Mentor, Dorothy I. Height Elementary*

Here is a little backstory. In 2011, citywide advocates came together to launch Transform Baltimore. This campaign united school communities, organizations, and city government officials behind the goal of adopting the ACLU's \$1 billion school construction funding proposal. 85% of school buildings in Baltimore were in poor condition, with leaking roofs, faulty heating and cooling systems, and outdated technology. In 2013, the campaign won the \$1 billion program, now called the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Program.

Though we are winding down the school year, the Reservoir Hill community got to spend a few months in their new home. Parents, students, and faculty approached the new school to the sound of drumming and a greeting committee. Students in suits and bow ties welcomed other students, parents, and faculty on a red carpet with balloon arches, treating them all with the love and respect they deserved. After stopping to take red carpet photos and pick up their t-shirts, the students headed into the shiny cafeteria for breakfast. The love and positive energy was palpable.

Since then, the school has hosted many community events in the auditorium, such as the Baltimore Arts Education Initiative Town Hall where we had the pleasure of seeing the school's DIVAS step team perform!

***"The new Dorothy I. Height Elementary School reflects not only an investment in the infrastructure of our school buildings, but a commitment of excellence to the children of our city. As with many school buildings, Dorothy I. Height Elementary will be, both, a place to foster our students' academic success, and a neighborhood resource center for folks throughout the nearby communities."***

***-Delegate Antonio Hayes***

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Though the beautiful new school was full of science, art, technology, and collaborative spaces with huge windows, the staff at 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools knew it would be tough on families from Westside Elementary which was slated to close. Nicole Price, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools spokesperson, emphasized the need to center the students in the naming process. The students at the two merged schools needed a shared identity. To do that, they needed a new name. The name mattered. They voted and ultimately chose to honor an education and civil rights activist and leader who was president of the National Council of Negro Women for 40 years. How perfect!

Dorothy I. Height Elementary was one of the first of 28 schools to be rebuilt or renovated, so there were inevitably growing pains in the process. Jennifer McDowell, Director of Community Schools at Child First Authority, noted that this process required two dedicated staff to pull it off which is a tremendously heavy lift for schools without that kind of staffing capacity. Having staffed partner organizations to work with the community throughout the design process was critical. The coordinated effort yielded incredible results. "What happened at John Eager Howard set the stage for every other school," said McDowell.

Thank you to everyone who helped make the opening of Dorothy I. Height Elementary a success!

### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

This fall, many more students will get an experience much like Dorothy I. Height Elementary opening day. The following five schools are scheduled to open in September:

1. Robert Poole Building (Academy for College and Career Exploration and Independence School Local 1 High)
2. Arundel PK-2
3. Cherry Hill 3-8
4. Forest Park High School
5. Pimlico PK-8

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***Help continue to bring life to Baltimore City students, parents, school staff, and communities.***

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