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A secret in Canton

By Matthew Hornbeck, Christine Kotchenreuther and James Reeb

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EVERYONE WANTS the same thing: A good school with good teachers that will lead to more and better opportunities for their children.

Let's pause and reflect on the good things in our schools. This is a thanksgiving piece, an antidote to the drumbeat of negativity that so often drives the conversation around the city schools.

What kind of school do you want?

Do you want your kids to enjoy learning and return home full of curiosity and excitement? Do you want your son to read classics such as Tom Sawyer, The Odyssey and The Prince and the Pauper and write well? Would you be happy if your daughter grew up to be a mathematician or scientist? Do you want her to go to college and graduate school and earn enough to comfortably support her own family?

We've got a Baltimore school for you.

Do you want your child to attend a school where 90 percent of first- and second-graders pass those state tests? Where fourth-grade reading scores are above the state average and second-grade grade reading scores were in the top 10 in the city? Where student attendance rates exceed the state average? What about a safe, small school that will teach your child to read and write and do math and science at world-class levels?

Do you want the staff at your child's school to be caring and talented? A school where there is the control to make hiring, training and budget decisions in the best interests of students? Where experienced teachers come to work after they have a couple of years under their belt in county schools? Where small class sizes and a pre-kindergarten-through-eighth-grade setting will prepare your child for the best public and private high schools in the region?

Where there is full-day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten with snack time, rest time and lots of learning? Where the parent-teacher organization raises up to \$20,000 each year? Where teachers, teacher assistants, secretaries, members of the [Baltimore Symphony Orchestra](#), house painters, contractors, lawyers, laborers, doctors and staff from the [Johns Hopkins University](#) send their children? A school that Long & Foster views as a selling point for the neighborhood?

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How about recess every day? A whole-foods pilot program to bring tasty, healthy eating to kids? An art teacher with formal training, a full-time gym teacher and a full-time librarian/computer specialist? Where there is a computer laboratory, a stocked library, an active student council, an experiential learning Audubon Society program, an exploratory music program, a concert band, Daisies, Brownies, wrestling, martial arts, soccer, theater and a championship chess club?

How about a high-quality before- and after-school care program right in the school? (Yes, you can go to work and know that your child is safe and engaged at school for as long as you need each day.) Where there is a new principal and a new assistant principal committed to staying with you and making the school wonderful for years and years to come? Man, do we have a school for you.

Do you believe in public schools because they breed tolerance and joy and connect us to the neighborhoods in which we live and work? How about a school that will cost you a lot less than the more than \$15,000 Gilman and Friends charge to go to first grade? In fact, how about no tuition? The only requirement is that you bring your child every day, on time and ready to learn. It's a school that insists that you are active in the education of your child.

How about a wonderfully diverse school where the student body is white, black, Latino, American Indian and Asian? How about a school that serves children who originally hail from Canton, [Fells Point](#), a dozen states along the East Coast, Mexico, Somalia and Mongolia? A school where middle-class families choose to send their children? Where families, regardless of income, put a priority on education and are strong advocates for their children and grandchildren?

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How about a school with long-term partners such as Struever Bros. Eccles and Rouse, Legg Mason, the Kiwanis Club of East Baltimore and the Canton Railroad Co.? A school where a science laboratory is being built this year? Where the sun shines in because every single window is new? How about a new faculty lounge for those wonderful teachers? A building circa 1989 that has new paint, beautiful murals by local artists, central air conditioning, no lead paint, clean water and a cafeteria that overlooks one of the most beautiful city parks in the United States?

If you want a school like this one, then we have the school for you. Move to Canton. Move to [Fells Point](#). Move to [Patterson Park](#). You can send your children to Hampstead Hill Academy elementary school - one of the city's many great neighborhood schools. We've been at this location since 1936. And you can still walk to all of the great restaurants and nightlife that draw the masses. Come live, work and go to school in Baltimore. We do.

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