

Recently, a group gathered to network and discuss their career paths. Like any other professionals, all were in business attire, shaking hands, making eye contact, giving practiced elevator speeches. But these were not typical professionals. In this case, all were high school students.

These young men and women from Baltimore were gathered to celebrate the start of their 3-month, paid, professional internships with businesses across the city through Urban Alliance's Future Surveyors Internship Program.

The room was filled with excitement and optimism. Unfortunately, too many high school students in Baltimore lack access to the opportunities and support needed to turn that hopefulness into future success.

That's why Urban Alliance brought our flagship High School Internship Program to Baltimore a decade ago. The goal is to give youth from underserved communities in the city access to meaningful, early employment and skills training opportunities.

In the 10 years since we started serving Baltimore youth, we've seen radical shifts in our students' view of the future once they go through our program. The simple realization that they are not only capable of working in a professional setting, but also valued there, allows them to aspire to more. Students graduate from our program and from high school with the tools, experience, and outlook needed to succeed in the workplace.

After successfully branching out our High School Internship Program last year to include construction industry internships for students in Baltimore City Public Schools career and technology education (CTE) courses, we recently launched a new program for CTE students. In partnership with Grads2Careers and the Maryland Society of Surveyors, we launched the aforementioned Future Surveyors Internship Program for high school seniors interested in land surveying. The program trains these students in professional skills they wouldn't otherwise learn in the classroom such as professional communication and etiquette, then pairs them with a paid internship related to their field of study and skill set, and two caring adults – one at Urban Alliance and one on the job – who mentor and support the student throughout the internship. In addition, students receive weekly life and job skills workshops to assist them with post-high school planning and deepen their professional development, and ongoing support after they graduate.

The students who gathered to kick off this program last month are now working at businesses such as Precision Measurement, Wallace Montgomery, Century Engineering, Navarro & Wright, and RK&K. The combination of real-world experience and soft skills training will give them a competitive advantage over their peers in securing a well-paid career. In turn, preparing these young people for a 21st century workforce helps businesses build a diverse local talent pipeline.

Members of the Md. Washington Minority Companies Association understand that one of the biggest barriers to increasing diversity in the workforce is lack of access – to employment, to training, to professional networks, and to opportunities to succeed. Opening the door to the professional world for students who wouldn't otherwise get that exposure can change their entire trajectory.

Investing in early work experience and training is really a form of talent pipeline management, and has the potential to not only produce better workers, but more economically successful adults.

Earlier this year, The Baltimore Sun editorial board [argued that](#) there is no better investment that the state of Maryland can make than better preparing high school students for the workforce. But it's not just the state that benefits when young people are able to become economically self-sufficient – and it's not only the state who should take responsibility for building the next generation of workers.

A rising tide lifts all boats – and that includes businesses. Taking on a high school intern is an investment that pays off in both increased diversity (both demographic and intellectual), staff morale, corporate social responsibility, and management opportunities now, as well as a stronger workforce in the future.

There are talented, motivated students all across Baltimore who are unable to access the economic opportunities the city offers. Taking an intern can help change that one student at a time.

A graduate of our first class of CTE interns, Vernon Woodly, interned at Gilbane Construction Company last year and is now earning a living as an apprentice at Homewood General Contracting, a position he was offered on the strength of his work at Gilbane – his very first job. He now has a bright future ahead of him.

Urban Alliance partners with businesses across the city to provide internships for students like Vernon, and is currently gearing up for the class of 2018-19. If you want to help a young person realize their potential, consider becoming a job partner.

Visit theurbanalliance.org or call 410-366-5780 today to learn more about becoming a job partner.