

TOP NEWS

City students press for takeover of state School Board

Ron Cassie, The Examiner
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BALTIMORE -

It is appropriate that high school students would take such a radical idea to heart.

As part of a 12-year struggle to get adequate funding to Baltimore schools from the state, city high school students with the Algebra Project filed a motion in Baltimore Circuit Court on Monday to take over the state School Board.

They cited Article 6 of the Maryland Declaration of Rights in Maryland Constitution passed in 1776 — as the basis for their action. It reads, in part, “... whenever ... all other means of redress are ineffectual, the People may, and of right ought, to reform the old, or establish a new Government.”

The purpose of the proposed takeover was to authorize the state to release between \$400 million and \$600 million still owed to the city schools, based on past rulings by Judge Joseph H.H. Kaplan, said Jay Gillen, a city school teacher and adviser to the Algebra Project.

Kaplan didn't rule in the students favor, but did not dismiss their motion out-of-hand.

In two months, the students, city schools and city and the state officials will be back in court to address funding issues.

“I see this as victory,” said Chris Goodman, City College senior. “The judge didn't give us control of the School Board, but we will be back in front of him in 60 days.”

The five-year-old Baltimore Algebra Project, part of national organization advocating for urban and rural schools, has picked up the mantle of adequate funding for Baltimore schools, first begun in 1994, in the case known as Bradford v. Maryland State Board of Education.

That suit led Kaplan to rule that Baltimore schools had been historically underfunded and eventually resulted in the Thorton Commission Act. Since 2003, according to Bill Reinhard of the state Department of Education, the Baltimore system has received \$200 million in additional funding.

The students make the point, “that they are basically still owed back pay, so to speak,” said Bebe Verdery, an ACLU attorney handling the ongoing Bradford case.

“It's an important symbolic gesture,” Verdery said. “It demonstrates their frustration with judicial, legislative and executive branches of government. It has been crucial to this case that the students' voice be heard. It has helped keep the funding drive going — there have been attempts to underfund Thorton and cut it half when the state was in a deficit.”

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