

PRESS RELEASE

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After Nearly Three Decades, City Schools Fully Emerges from Vaughn G. Litigation

District's continued progress leads to end of two-year settlement; closes one of nation's longest-standing special education lawsuits—and critical chapter for City Schools

(Baltimore, MD)—Two-and-a-half years ago, Baltimore City Public Schools entered into a settlement agreement in the special education lawsuit that placed it under court oversight for 26 years. The March, 2010 settlement essentially marked a probationary period for the district, and because it has continued to improve delivery of services to students with disabilities during that time, the probationary period is now over. *Vaughn G. et al. vs. the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore et al.* (Vaughn G.) is officially closed.

“This closes a difficult, but important chapter in City Schools history,” said Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners Chair Neil Duke. “Difficult, because nearly 30 years of litigation has meant facing some difficult truths about how we failed our kids, not to mention the administrative and financial burden that long-term litigation places on a school district. And important, because the litigation has made us better at what we do—especially for our students with disabilities who, for too long, were denied the educational supports and services they deserved.”

“The end of the settlement reflects the hard work of so many people over such a long period of time—staff whose commitment to improvement has been extraordinary, the various parties of the lawsuit who have been diligent partners with City Schools in the work, and our students who have made major gains and shown what they can do when we, the adults, get things right,” said City Schools CEO Andrés A. Alonso. “And I especially want to emphasize the collaboration with our Vaughn G. partners, including the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Disability Law Center on behalf of the case’s student plaintiffs. Their focus on what was best for students pushed us where we needed pushing. And I look forward to continuing to work with them moving forward. While we got much better as a result of Vaughn G., there is still much work to do to continue to ensure excellent services and supports to our students with disabilities.”

“MSDE has worked in close partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools over the past two decades, which led to greatly improved services for the system’s most vulnerable student population,” said State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery. “The end of this case is worthy of celebration. We look forward to continued partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools to ensure continued success.”

Since 1984, City Schools has been involved in federal litigation over its failure to meet the needs of, and deliver adequate services to, students with disabilities—approximately 15 percent of its student population. The case resulted in a consent decree in 2000 that laid out the obligations City Schools had to meet to end the case. The district’s compliance and progress in meeting these obligations led to the March 2010 settlement, which in turn ended September 15 and drew to a final close one of the nation’s longest-standing special education lawsuits.

With the settlement over, City Schools enters into a reporting relationship with MSDE that is just like every other district in the state when it comes to delivery of special education services.

The final close of the Vaughn G. case also coincides with—and reflects—the maturation of reforms in City Schools, where the infrastructure for improving teaching and learning is now solidly in place and the focus now is on what is happening in every classroom, at every school.

“The closing of Vaughn G. is a tremendous sign of progress and change for the parents of children with disabilities,” said Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. “Reaching this point required a sense of urgency as well as a robust collaboration between the school system, the state and the plaintiffs. Now we can move forward with confidence that our most vulnerable students will receive the educational opportunities they deserve.”

“This settlement marks the end of a long and arduous road, but it also represents the best in collaboration to ensure our children are provided the tools they need to thrive and succeed,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “I appreciate the commitment of the parents, the hard work of the teachers and the dedication of administrators throughout this long process. Most importantly, I admire the children who for years suffered from inadequate learning environments. The closing of this suit represents a new era for parents and for children with disabilities: A new era of accountability, excellence and dedication.”