

Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Limited voting makes sense for student member of school board

If we trust a student enough to sit on the school board, doesn't it make sense to let that student vote on at least some of the issues that come before that board?

Seven Maryland jurisdictions, including neighboring Montgomery and Howard counties, seem to think so. Those school districts now allow either full or partial voting rights for student members of their school boards.

Frederick County has so far resisted giving our student board member this ability. The change needs to take place in the state Legislature, and there hasn't been enough support from the county's delegation to get the change made.

We're hopeful this could be the year for a change. And we think there's reason to be optimistic.

Last Thursday, the county delegation voted 5-3 to support a bill that would give the student member a chance to have a meaningful vote on matters that are non-budgetary items. The bill will next be heard by the House of Delegates' Ways and Means Committee on Feb. 19.

In addition, Board of Education President Brad Young told News-Post reporter Katelyna Perera that he and the other school board members support the bill and plan to write a letter of support.

Currently, the student board member here can participate in school board discussions, but their vote is symbolic — it is recorded for the record but does not count.

Should this latest bill pass, the student board member could vote on such things as setting the agenda for Board of Education meetings, ap-

proposals, and other judicial or quasi-judicial matters such as the school calendar or the budget.

And this is a good distinction to consider. Frederick County residents vote for school board members, and it's important that those who are elected are held accountable for the way school funding is spent and how personnel decisions are made.

But we also think the student board member should have some say — beyond having a seat at the table — in how the school system operates. The member does, after all, represent the roughly 43,000 students who attend Frederick County Public Schools, and is elected by those students.

Giving students some role in setting their own education priorities can only make the process better. The student member of the board has already provided context for the other board members on issues. Limited voting seems to be a natural progression.

Melanie Andrew, a Catoctin High School senior and president of the Frederick County Student Council Association, and Malachi Maccon, the current Frederick County student member of the school board, have both worked with bill sponsors Del. Carol Krimm, Del. Karen Lewis Young and Sen. Ron Young this session.

"Our plan is to start with the restricted voting rights so the board members or the delegation can see how the student member runs it and then if [a future] student member wishes to expand the voting rights, it will be easier," Andrew told our reporter.

We think that's a smart approach. The best way to build