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Education



Debate: the new teaching method

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During Baltimore Urban Debate League Tournament No. 3, there was very low parent attendance. In support of the students, the BUDL and the AFRO-American Newspapers urge parents and school administrators to attend Tournament No. 4 - No. 7. All BUDL Tournaments are held on Saturdays and are free of charge.

Debate, something school administrators and school

board officials do when they 'disagree' with each other, might just be what revives education for Baltimore City students.

Where other methods have failed, debate is fast becoming

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one of the newest, yet overlooked, methods of teaching. "Debate Across the Curriculum", a new initiative

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of the Baltimore Urban Debate League, will expose students that do not participate in debates as an extracurricular activity in the classroom. Whether it is math, science, or English, teachers are now being trained to use debate as a tool in every classroom.

"Debate, it really requires students to internalize what they have learned over many subjects areas because they have to really be able to put up a good argument and defend the point-of-view," Linda Chinnia, chief academic officer of Baltimore City Public Schools. "That requires students to do more than just hear someone talk about something or read about it in a textbook. I think that's the highest level of learning. The ability to put together a solid, coherent presentation is absolutely critical. I don't know that we always do it as well as we should, but debate is an excellent way to learn."

Chinnia says that the prospects of debate are so convincing that "the school system has identified funds to expand the 'Debate Across the Curriculum' program."

Since 1999, the BUDL has made debate widely accessible to public high school students in Baltimore City. Now more than 12,000 students nationwide have joined urban debate leagues. BUDL currently oversees debate programs in 27 of

Baltimore's public high schools, with Digital Harbor High School being its newest addition.

At BUDL tournaments, students debate about issues like abortion, affirmative action, capital punishment, fiscal and economic turmoil, and world diplomacy or the lack thereof.

Although the subject matters are complex, the concept of debate is not. A debate squad is made up of teams. Each team has two debaters from the same school and compete in either the novice, junior varsity, or varsity divisions. Each team must support the topic, the affirmative and/or argue against the topic, the negative. Debaters typically support argument using their own reasoning or published sources they use as evidence, which they deliver as a speech. Whichever team has the best support for their argument is likely to win.

Each debate has one judge, and that judge must vote for one of the two teams. Judges are making their decisions on the arguments and evidence.

"These students work hard to prepare for debates," said Chris Baron, director of BUDL. "Students attend intense summer workshops that last five weeks. These workshops are held at prestigious colleges around the country, students do very little apart from debating."

Much like school athletic

programs, BUDL has scholarship opportunities to a four-year college or university, ranging from \$100 to full tuition. The BUDL also assist students in acquiring debate scholarships from the college or university of their choice.

Through debate, parents can judge competitions and become more involved in their kids' extracurricular activities than football or basketball ever allowed. "I wish we'd get more parent volunteers judging debates," said Beth Skinner, assistant director of speech/debate programs at Towson University. "It's not a magical feat. You don't have to be an expert in peacekeeping to judge debates. Anyone who can spare a couple of hours on a Saturday could judge. What these kids know intimidates some parents."

"If parents come and participate, we have tutorials before each competition at the debate site that teaches newcomers how to judge. And you'll get paid to judge!"

On Dec. 18, 27 Baltimore City public high schools debate squads will gather again for BUDL Tournament No. 4, against Baltimore Catholic Forensic League on the campus of Towson University. For more information on "Debate Across the Curriculum," call 410-704-2969 or log onto www.budl.org.