

Summary of Desegregation Litigation and Proposed Consent Order

On July 21, 1966 the United States (through the Department of Justice) filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking desegregation of the Richland Parish public schools. The federal court entered several orders that still govern the District today. Since 2010, the United States has conducted a comprehensive review of the District focusing on the six (6) factors laid out by the United States Supreme Court for determining whether a district has obtained unitary status so that its case can be dismissed. Those factors are student assignment, teacher assignment, staff assignment, facilities, transportation, and extracurricular activities.

History and Overview

The District has been able to satisfy the United States that it has removed all remnants of past discrimination in the areas of facilities, transportation, and extracurricular activities. As a result, the federal court has determined that the District is unitary in those factors and has dismissed the litigation as to those factors. The United States remains concerned about the other three (3) factors, however, and it has submitted a proposed consent order to address those factors. A summary of the major components of the proposed consent order follows.

Student Assignment

The District operates eleven (11) schools and, as of its last student count, serves 3,099 students. Fifty-four percent (54%) of those students are black, 44% are white, and 2% are other races. The United States is concerned that ten (10) of the eleven schools operated by the District have student enrollments that vary from district wide racial percentages by more than 20%. In the proposed consent order, the United States attempts to address the student racial imbalances in the schools by changes in attendance zones, grade structures of schools, and feeder patterns.

A. Attendance Zone Changes

- (1) The attendance zone for Start Elementary School would be expanded slightly toward Rayville to pick up some students living north of Highway 80 and west of Highway 137. The remainder of the Start Elementary attendance zone would stay the same.
- (2) The attendance zone for Holly Ridge Elementary School would be expanded slightly toward Delhi to pick up some students living south of I-20. The remainder of the Holly Ridge Elementary attendance zone would stay the same.
- (3) No other attendance zone changes are contained in the proposed consent order submitted by the United States.

B. School Grade Changes

- (1) Start Elementary School would become a PreK-6 school, rather than a PreK-8 school.
- (2) Holly Ridge Elementary School would become a K-6 school, rather than a K-8 school.
- (3) Rayville Elementary School would become a PreK-6 school, rather than a PreK-5 school.
- (4) Rayville Junior High School would become a school for students in grades 7-8, rather than 6-8.
- (5) No other changes in school grades are contained in the proposed consent order.

C. Feeder Pattern Changes

- (1) Students who “graduate” from Holly Ridge Elementary School (K-6) would attend Delhi Middle School for grades 7-8 and Delhi High School for grades 9-12, rather than Rayville High School for grades 9-12.
- (2) No other feeder pattern changes are contained in the proposed consent order.

Faculty and Staff Assignment

The percentages of white and black teachers and staff members vary significantly between the schools, and the United States has requested that something be done to address this concern. It has proposed the following.

- (1) By May 1, 2016, the District shall develop a plan to assign its faculty and staff in ways that do not reflect the racial identity of the student enrollment of the schools and shall submit such plan to the United States for approval.
- (2) There are no other obligations placed on the District in the proposed consent order relative to the factors of faculty assignment and staff assignment.

Miscellaneous Provisions

A. M-to-M transfers

- (1) The District will enhance its efforts to advertise the availability of M-to-M transfers.
- (2) For the 2016-17 school year, the District will expand its academic enrichment and after school programs at Rayville Elementary, Rayville Junior, Delhi Elementary and Delhi Middle School and will more effectively advertise the availability of that program.

B. Delhi Charter School (DCS)

- (1) The proposed consent order calls for a single application for Delhi Charter School and Delhi Elementary School kindergarten, a joint kindergarten open house, and a lottery system to assign kindergarten students to the 2 schools.
- (2) In the consent order proposed by the United States, DCS could not accept transfer students from Richland Parish who have ever enrolled in the Richland Parish School System unless those students were children of DCS employees or those students attended a school in Richland Parish in which their race was in the majority and were seeking transfer to DCS where their race was in the minority.

C. Reporting

On or before October 15 of each year during the term of the proposed consent order, the School Board and DCS would be required to submit detailed reports on implementation of provisions of the order.

Final Termination of Case

If the School Board accepts this proposal and fully and appropriately implements the requirements of it, it would be able to move for a declaration of unitary status and dismissal of this litigation at any time after December 15, 2017. If the School Board does not accept this proposal, then the case goes to trial right away and the Court would decide what, if anything, would have to be done to address the concerns of the United States. The Court could decide that nothing needs to be done to the public schools in the parish, or it could decide that all of the schools need to be altered in some fashion.