

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA
LAFAYETTE-OPELOUSAS DIVISION**

Marilyn Marie Monteilh, et al

Civil Action No. 65-10912

versus

Judge Tucker L. Melançon

St. Landry Parish School Board,
et al

**STATEMENT ISSUED BY UNITED STATES
DISTRICT JUDGE TUCKER L. MELANÇON
AT THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE
ST. LANDRY PARISH SCHOOL BOARD
ON JUNE 16, 2005**

I have taken the somewhat unusual step of providing the members of the St. Landry Parish School Board, the attorneys for the parties, as well as all of those who are present in Court today with a written copy of the statement that I am about to make in order that the members of the School Board and the lawyers for the parties may follow along as I read it.

I suspect that what follows will be the most important thing that I say here today, indeed it may be the most important thing that I have said since this case was assigned to me on February 2, 2000. I instruct the Clerk of Court to file a copy of the written statement into the record of this proceeding to serve as any future occasion may require.

First, I would like to congratulate and thank the present School Board as well as the previous School Board for their work and effort under the leadership of Superintendent Lannie Moreau and his dedicated Central Office staff to bring the St. Landry Parish

School System into compliance with Brown vs. The Board of Education. Some members of the School Board, Superintendent Moreau, and his Central Office have endured considerable pressure from all sides, in their effort to fulfill their duties under clearly established law and the orders of this Court.

Most of the orders that I signed in this case, over the last four years, are in the form of Consent Decrees. A Consent Decree is an agreement between the original plaintiffs, the United States Department of Justice, and the St. Landry Parish School Board which was made an order of this Court without a trial or a hearing; that is, the parties to this litigation signed off on the agreement before the Court ever acted on it.

Truly remarkable progress has been made in the last four years in resolving the issues between the parties in this case. On March 18, 2004, when the Court approved the plan adopted by the St. Landry Parish School Board to reorganize the System's schools, I stated on the record in this very courtroom, "while we could not yet see the light at the end of the tunnel, we were definitely in the tunnel." As I stated further at the regular quarterly meeting conducted in this case in open Court on December 9, 2004, "the light at the end of the tunnel could at last be seen." In private conversations since, I have shared with various members of the School Board, the lawyers for the parties, the Superintendent, principals, teachers and citizens of St. Landry Parish, that while I did not think it likely that the St. Landry Parish School System would be declared unitary during the term of the present School Board, I felt it more than

probable that the System would be declared unitary, ending this 40 year old case during the first half of the four year term of the next School Board if the School Board continued to comply with the obligations it made under the previous Consent Decrees and faithfully implemented the reorganization plan of the System's schools.

Unfortunately, in recent months this Court has observed a most disturbing trend from a reading of the transcripts of the School Board meetings. The April 7, 2005 School Board meeting lasted from 4:00 p.m. until 9:10, a total of 5 hours and 10 minutes, the May 5, 2005 meeting lasted from 4:00 p.m. until 9:50 p.m. for a total of 5 hours and 50 minutes, and the June 1, 2005 meeting lasted from 4:00 p.m. until 7:45 p.m. for a total of 3 hours and 45 minutes.

During the course of the last three months, certain members of the School Board, for reasons known only to themselves: have attempted to dismiss Superintendent Moreau; have attempted to not re-employ critical Central Office staff, who under the Superintendent's leadership have been the key players in the progress the School System has made in the last four years in ridding itself of Federal Court supervision; and, have tried to micro-manage the operation of the School System by attempting to require the Superintendent and his Central Office staff to produce reams of paper at considerable expense, which takes an inordinate number of man hours to produce and is of little or no value to individual School Board members or any one else - information which, while each member of the School Board is absolutely entitled to receive if he or

she so desires and which, to the Court's knowledge, until recently, had been provided to individual School Board members by the Superintendent or the Central Office supervisor in charge of the area of inquiry upon the mere request of a School Board member with an in-person meeting.

Most recently those certain School Board members have begun an effort to discredit and replace the School Board's attorney, Gerard Caswell, who, from the Court's vantage point has served the people of St. Landry Parish and his client, the St. Landry Parish School Board, so well. It is the Court's belief, based on observation, that the progress the School System has made to date is in no small part due to Mr. Caswell's rapport with, and the respect he enjoys from opposing counsel as to his legal ability and to his integrity.

Lastly, although it is not apparent from the cold sterile transcript of the recent School Board meetings, it has been reported to the Court by observers at those meetings in whose credibility the Court has absolute confidence, that certain members of the School Board subtly, but actually, encourage those in attendance at the meetings to become vocal in favor of or opposed to issues that the School Board is considering, a number of which issues are directly or indirectly related to the implementation of the reorganization of the St. Landry Parish schools.

As a result of the foregoing and the Court's perception based thereon, the Court will enter an order today requiring the St. Landry Parish School Board to post a copy

of this statement and the complete transcript of each of the School Board's meetings on the System's website, *www.slp.k12.la.us*, starting with the Board's March 2, 2005 meeting and all meetings thereafter during the pendency of this litigation.

By entering such an order, it is the intention of the Court to afford as many citizens of St. Landry Parish as possible the opportunity to read what the Court has had the opportunity to read and to evaluate for themselves the conduct of their individual School Board member in this desegregation case.

After four years of the significant progress in this 40 year old litigation and the St. Landry Parish School System's gargantuan effort under Superintendent Moreau's leadership to comply with its obligations under the United States Constitution and clearly established law, it is well past the time when certain School Board members should be able to blame with impunity the Superintendent, the Central Office staff, the School Board's attorney, the original plaintiffs, the United States Department of Justice, or even this Court for those individual members' efforts or lack thereof, not only to not fully implement the Consent Decrees, but to actually obstruct the implementation of those Decrees.