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District Court rules for LDF clients in St. Martin Parish Desegregation Case

On August 1, a federal district court in Louisiana issued a ruling in [*Thomas v. School Board of St. Martin Parish*](#), ordering the school board to follow a plan proposed by the plaintiffs that advances desegregation efforts in the district. The Court's order adopts the plaintiffs' remedial proposal to keep Black and white students together in grades 2 to 5 at St. Martinville Primary School. However, the order also allows the District to reopen Catahoula Elementary School – a small, predominately white school in the district – as a PK-1 school. The [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) and co-counsel Gideon Garter of Baton Rouge represent the plaintiffs, Black students and parents, in the class action lawsuit.

"I'm happy that the Court made the right decision and picked the plan that allows all students, Black and white, to continue to learn and grow together at St. Martinville Primary school," said Alaine Smith, a client in the case. "However, I'm disappointed that the school board wasted our tax dollars fighting to fully reopen Catahoula."

"We commend the Court for supporting our clients' fight to integrate all St. Martinville schools," said Katrina Feldkamp, LDF assistant counsel. "By refusing to return Catahoula Elementary to the status quo, the Court's ruling today moves the parish closer to finally fulfilling the promises of *Brown v. Board*."

"We are pleased with the Court's decision to accept our remedial proposal," said Joseph Wong, LDF assistant counsel. "In making this pivotal decision, the Court has refused to place the burden of desegregation on Black students, and instead preserved as much racial integration and progress as possible."

The court's ruling follows an earlier decision in May ordering the school board to implement desegregation measures across the district. Catahoula Elementary School had originally been ordered to close by the court in 2021 as part of desegregation efforts in the parish, a decision reversed in the Fifth Circuit Court in 2022. For years, Catahoula had been a barrier to desegregation because the district operated it as the white counterpart to two nearby predominately Black schools, St. Martinville Primary School

(grades 2-5) and the Early Learning Center (grades PK-1). While the district court reiterated that keeping Catahoula closed would be the best way to racially integrate all schools, in 2022, the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals the district court to consider options for reopening Catahoula. By limiting Catahoula to only grades PK-1, the court chose the least harmful option and protected the successful integration of students in grades 2-5 at St. Martinville Primary. This latest development in the case is a positive step forward for the St. Martin Parish school district.

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