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Report: School System Maintaining Desegregation Agreement

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It's been two years since the desegregation case against the East Baton Rouge school system ended, but has the system lived up to its end of the settlement agreement? The answer to that and more in a report just released by the Public Affairs Research Council.

In August of 2003, federal judge James Brady signed the agreement which ended the 47-year-old desegregation case against the East Baton Rouge School Board. There were 21 requirements in the settlement that the school board would have to meet over the next four years.

Just short of two years have passed and Jim Brandt, of the Public Affairs Research Council, has released a study which shows the board continues to meet those requirements. But the struggle to climb out of a 47-year-old hole continues.

"Overall, the big challenge the system faces is, we still continue to lag the state average in overall performance. We are one of the lowest performing school systems in the state," says Brandt.

On the positive side, the report indicates the bleeding may have stopped, and there could be a turn-around in bringing families back to the system.

"It would indicate that the system is now either stabilized or perhaps the out-migration has come to a halt. That, I think is certainly good news. Another good indicator is the fact high school achievement scores have increased significantly in 2003-2004 and the system has produced some of the best magnet schools in the entire state."

School Superintendent Charlotte Placide says the report is helpful and appreciated. She, too, sees an emerging return of white students to the system. "I really see some real activity in the non-blacks coming back to our school. I talked to parents who are really excited and have left some of the private and parochial schools, and some have even lost deposits they put down. So I see that being a positive."

Placide says the work goes on in student achievement. And she says that will be helped by a continued increase in the number of highly qualified classroom teachers lured to the system by higher salaries now being offered.

The school system was unable to meet one of the 21 requirements in the desegregation settlement. That was a magnet school enrollment target of 55 percent black, 45 percent white. The white enrollment could not be attained. The failure to make the goal does not constitute a breach of contract.

Reporter: Paul Gates



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