

Adams v. Rankin County Board of Education

FACT SHEET

What is the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF)?

LDF is the nation's **oldest civil and human rights law organization**. LDF was **founded in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall**, who later became the first Black Supreme Court Justice.

Since its inception, LDF has worked to defend and advance racial equality and civil rights for Black Americans, including in education. We **litigated the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education***, which outlawed de jure segregation in public schools. Today, we continue to challenge racially discriminatory school policies and practices, including racial inequities within school districts.

Why did LDF sue Rankin County?

In 1967, LDF and local attorneys represented a group of Black parents and their children that sued the Rankin County Board of Education to integrate the school district. This case became known as ***Adams v. Rankin County Board of Education*** and led to the desegregation of schools in Rankin County.

Since 1970, Rankin County Schol District (RCSD) has been under multiple court orders to end school segregation. After Pearl Municipal School District was created, it was also placed under the same court orders. The goal of every desegregation case is to **eliminate the vestiges of past racial segregation**.

How is the case still active?

A desegregation case continues until a school district demonstrates to the court that it has eliminated the vestiges of segregation ("**unitary status**"). This requires the school district to show that it has fulfilled its duties under the desegregation orders in all areas, such as **facilities, transportation, student assignment, faculty and staff assignment, extracurricular activities, quality of education, and discipline**.

What is the status of the case?

In August 2024, **RCSD filed a submission to the court**, arguing that it has achieved unitary status and **asking the court to declare that it is no longer bound by the desegregation orders** in this case. A few months later, we filed a submission in opposition where we explained why RCSD has not fulfilled its duties. On **September 16, 2025, there will be a court hearing** at the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi to determine whether the Court Orders remain in place over Rankin County schools. The hearing will not affect Pearl schools.

How has RCSD failed to fulfill its duty to desegregate?

RCSD has failed to eliminate the vestiges of segregation in **four key areas**: student assignment, faculty and staff assignment, student discipline, and extracurricular activities.

- In the area of **student assignment**, RCSD uses its student transfer policy in a way that increases racial segregation between schools. In addition, significant racial disparities persist in how RCSD refers and assigns students to the gifted and Advanced Placement programs.
- RCSD maintains schools with racially segregated **faculty and staff** and has denied Black faculty and staff equal opportunities in recruitment, hiring, and promotions.
- In the area of **student discipline**, RCSD punishes Black children more often than white children for the same sorts of offenses. RCSD also maintains a highly subjective discipline system that is susceptible to bias and arbitrary enforcement.
- Black students, coaches, and sponsors are underrepresented in many **extracurricular activities** in the District, including varsity baseball, boys' varsity soccer, girls' varsity soccer, archery, Future Farmers of America, HOSA, varsity fast-pitch softball, diamond girls, and varsity cheer.

How can I get involved in the case?

Parents, students, former faculty/staff or applicants, and other members of the community:

- **Share your experiences with us** about racial equity and treatment of and opportunities for Black students and teachers in Rankin County schools, especially related to: **(1) faculty and staff assignment; (2) student assignment; (3) extracurricular activities; and (4) discipline.**
- **Fill out a comment form and send it to the court by September 2, 2025**, sharing your experience with Rankin County schools and whether you think the school district should stay bound by the court orders. You can also request to speak at the hearing.
 - **Mail your form to: Thad Cochran United States Courthouse, 501 E. Court Street, Suite 4.550, Jackson, Mississippi 39201**
 - **Email your form to: johnson_chambers@mssd.uscourts.gov**
- **Speak at the hearing on September 16, 2025.** You must submit a comment form in order to speak. The hearing is open to the public.

Your experiences matter and will help the court make a decision about the future of Rankin County schools.

Questions?

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Historical Timeline

- **1954:** The United States Supreme Court issues the landmark unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and rules that racial segregation of children in public schools is unconstitutional. This case captures the hope of ensuring educational equity for all children.
- **1967:** A group of Black students and their parents file a suit against the Rankin County Board of Education. They are the original class plaintiffs. The plaintiffs contend that the quality of education for Black students and white students in RCSD is not the same and that RCSD operates under an unlawful and unequal racially dual public education system.
- **1970:** The Southern District of Mississippi District Court agrees with the plaintiffs and orders RCSD to (1) take affirmative steps to end all school segregation and (2) eliminate the effects of a racially dual public education system.
- **1971-1972:** The Rankin County Integration Plan is implemented. Students have the freedom to “zone jump,” or to attend any public school in the district. The plan does not work. White students leave the McLaurin School Zone and only 268 seats out of 1,330 available seats are filled. Meanwhile, the Florence School Zone is at overcapacity. Black teachers are fired or not rehired and the number of Black faculty in the district decreases by 26 percent.
- **1973:** The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals rules that the 1971-72 integration plan violates the Constitution. The court issues a consent decree and orders RCSD to desegregate classrooms, rehire Black faculty and staff, and give Black students equal access to extracurricular activities. The court also orders specific zoning to combat “white flight,” and zone jumping by white parents moving their children out of areas with integrated school zones.
- **1978:** The court issues a second consent decree, supplementing the 1970 Order and 1973 Consent Order. Among other things, the court orders that:
 - all schools operate without racial discrimination;
 - RCSD take affirmative steps to ensure proportionate Black participation for all student and faculty activities; and
 - Black staff are represented in all professional, administrative, and non-professional employment areas.
- **2019:** The court rules that RCSD has reached partial unitary status. This means that RCSD has fulfilled its duties under the desegregation order in two categories—transportation and facilities. However, RCSD has not achieved this for faculty and staff assignment, student assignment, extracurriculars, and quality of education.
- **2024:** RCSD files a motion seeking a declaration of unitary status in all remaining areas and an end to the case.
- **2025.** LDF files a motion on behalf of the plaintiffs opposing RCSD’s request because the District has not eliminated the vestiges of past racial segregation to the extent practicable.
- **September 16, 2025:** A hearing will be held at the Federal Courthouse in Jackson, Mississippi to determine whether the Court Orders remain in place.