

Little Rock School District Central High School Desegregation Timeline: 1954-56



1954

17 May – The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision is handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court, unanimously ruling that state laws mandating public school segregation are unconstitutional under the equal-protection clause of the 14th Amendment. The high court rejects the “separate but equal” doctrine in force since its *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling of 1896, declaring that segregated schools “are inherently unequal.”

22 May – The LRSD Board of Directors issues a policy statement asserting that the Little Rock School District would comply with the Supreme Court decision when methods and timelines are made available.

23 August – Eleven black children (three ninth-graders and eight elementary children) join 480 white students in the schools of Charleston, Ark., making it the first community in Arkansas (and the first in the former Confederate South) to integrate its schools. Administrators do not publicly make an announcement about the successful integration for three weeks, thus avoiding a media frenzy.

7 September – Fayetteville High School enrolls nine black students along with its 500 white students, following Charleston as the second desegregated system in Arkansas and the South.

1955

24 May – The LRSD Board of Directors and Superintendent Virgil T. Blossom issue a plan of gradual integration for Little Rock schools, beginning with the high schools, then the junior high schools, and finally the elementary schools (known as the “Blossom Plan”). The integration will begin in 1957.

11 July – Twenty-five black students enroll peacefully amid 1,000 white students in Hoxie, the third Arkansas school system to desegregate and the first in an area of the state with a substantial black population.

20 August – Mounting white opposition to integration in Hoxie, following a story in *Life* magazine, leads the local board to close its schools.

24 October – Hoxie schools reopen after a federal court bars segregationists from preventing the admission of blacks. Widespread white absenteeism is reported.

1956

8 February – The NAACP files a lawsuit against the Little Rock School District, claiming that 33 African-American children were denied admittance to white schools.

28 August – The NAACP suit is dismissed. Federal Judge John E. Miller declares that the School Board is acting “in utmost good faith” to set an integration plan in motion. The NAACP appeals the decision.

6 November – Voters approve three anti-integration measures: Amendment 47 (directing the legislature to create laws opposing *Brown v. Board of Education*); a Resolution of Interposition establishing a state policy of segregation; and Initiated Act 2, a pupil assignment law.

1957

19 February – The Arkansas Senate passes four pro-segregation bills: creation of the State Sovereignty Commission; removal of the mandatory school attendance requirement at all integrated schools; a requirement for the registration of certain individuals and organizations; and the authorization of school boards to use school funds to fight against integration. Governor Orval Faubus signs all four bills.

16 March – Wayne Upton and Henry V. Rath are elected to the LRSD Board of Directors by conclusive margins over the two segregationist candidates in their respective zones. Both Upton and Rath endorse the gradual integration plan.

27 April – The 8th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in St. Louis upholds Judge Miller’s dismissal of the NAACP suit.

30 August – Federal District Judge Ronald N. Davies orders the School Board to proceed with its integration of Little Rock Central High School on the opening day of school (September 3). Judge Davies enjoins “all persons in any manner, directly or indirectly,” from interfering with the integration plan.

2 September – The National Guard surrounds Central High on orders from Governor Faubus because of “evidence of disorder and threats of disorder.” After this act, the School Board instructs the nine black students who have registered to attend Central (and afterwards are known to the world as the “Little Rock Nine”) not to attempt to attend school.

3 September – Judge Davies orders that integration begin at Central High School on September 4. Governor Faubus announces that the National Guard will remain at the school.

4 September – The nine students attempt to enter the school but are turned away by the National Guard. Little Rock Mayor Woodrow Mann calls Governor Faubus' claims of threatened violence a hoax. Governor Faubus telegraphs President Dwight D. Eisenhower to stop "unwarranted interference of federal agents."

5 September – President Eisenhower responds to Governor Faubus, saying that the Constitution will "be upheld by every legal means" and requests "full co-operation to the United States District Court." The School Board asks for temporary suspension of the integration plan.

7 September – Judge Davies denies the School Board's request for temporary suspension of the integration plan. He orders integration to begin on September 9.

8 September – Governor Faubus goes on national television to re-affirm his stand against integration and insists that the federal government back off. He calls himself "the preserver of the peace," but declines to produce any hard evidence of reported violence over the issue.

9 September – Judge Davies directs federal authorities to bring proceedings against Governor Faubus and the National Guard officers to prevent them from interfering with the integration of Central High School.

14 September – Governor Faubus meets with President Eisenhower at the vacation White House in Newport, RI.

20 September – Judge Davies rules that Governor Faubus did not use the National Guard troops to preserve law and order and forbids him and the National Guard from interfering with integration. Faubus' attorney walks out of the hearing. The governor removes the National Guard from the school in the early evening, ending the 17-day military standoff with the federal government. Little Rock police then move in.

23 September – The Little Rock Nine enter a side door at Central High School as a crowd of about 1,000 whites riots out front. The police cannot handle the crowd. The nine students are removed from the school before noon for their safety. President Eisenhower calls the rioting disgraceful and issues a proclamation paving the way for the use of federal troops to stop it.

24 September – The 101st Airborne Division (1,100 officers and soldiers) rolls into Little Rock. The Arkansas National Guard is placed under federal orders and mobilized.

25 September – Under troop escort, the nine students ride up to Central High School in an Army staff car and enter the school.

9 October – Governor Faubus states that only the withdrawal of the nine students would end the crisis at Central High School.

26 October – the NAACP files suits in federal District court challenging the validity of Act 83 of 1957, creating the state Sovereignty Commission, and the Little Rock “Bennett” ordinance, requiring certain organizations to file membership lists and other information.

3 December – Mrs. L.C. (Daisy) Bates, state NAACP president, is fined \$100 in Little Rock Municipal Court for failing to comply with the Little Rock “Bennett” ordinance.

17 December – Black student Minnijean Brown dumps a bowl of chili on two of her white antagonists in the Central High cafeteria. She receives a six-day suspension.

29 December – The Public Affairs Committee of Freedom House says in its year-end report that Governor Faubus and Russia’s satellites were the two major factors helping to tilt the scales against freedom in 1957.

Sources:

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