

## MEREDITH v. JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION



■ **The Louisville School District:** During the 2003-2004 school year, the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) served about 97,000 students. Of those students, 34% were black, and 66% were “other.” (The “other” students were almost all white. All races other than black and white, in total, account for less than 5% of the students.) Until 2000, JCPS was under a court order to desegregate its schools. As substantial residential segregation continues, JCPS adopted a plan in 2000 to voluntarily integrate its schools.

■ **The Louisville Plan:** Under the JCPS plan, every student is initially assigned to a school based on where they live (their “resides school”). Elementary schools are grouped into clusters, and students can choose to attend another school in their cluster (“cluster resides” school). After being initially assigned to a school, students can also request a transfer to any JCPS school.

■ **The Racial Guidelines:** JCPS set the broad guideline that every school should seek 15% to 50% black enrollment. In this case, the guideline helped JCPS evaluate the transfer request. Yet, as the district court noted, “[e]ven where race does ‘tip’ the balance in some cases, it does so only at the end of the process, after residence, choice and all the other factors have played their part.”

■ **The Results:** Ninety-five percent of elementary school students were assigned to their resides school or their first-choice cluster resides school. All middle and high school students attend their resides schools if they choose. The Louisville plan successfully avoids extreme racial segregation, while at the same time both (a) preserving neighborhood schools for the majority of students who choose them, and (b) allowing all students a broad range of options if they prefer to attend a school other than their neighborhood “resides” school. Parents in Louisville approve. In a 2000 University of Kentucky Survey, 82 percent of respondents believed that students benefited from a racially integrated school environment. Seventy-seven percent of the parents (and 89 percent of the African-American parents) believed schools should have enrollment guidelines to ensure that children attend school with students of different racial backgrounds.

■ **Victory in the Courts:** JCPS won in Federal District Court: the judge upheld the school board’s assignment plan, including its limited use of race. The Sixth Circuit affirmed. The District Court explained:

The Court concludes that the 2001 Plan uses race in a manner calculated not to harm any particular person because of his or her race. Certainly, no student is directly denied a benefit because of race so that another of a different race can receive that benefit. Rather, the Board uses race in a limited way to achieve benefits for all students through its integrated schools.

Crystal Meredith now appeals the decision, claiming that her son, who was assigned to his resides school, was denied a transfer to a school outside of his cluster because of his race in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

■ For further information, please visit LDF’s website at [www.naacpldf.org](http://www.naacpldf.org).