

# Little Rock School District Central High School Desegregation Timeline: 1958



## 1958

8 January – Jim Johnson of Crossett, a segregationist, files a comprehensive proposed amendment to the state constitution including a provision by which integrated schools could be closed and sold.

24 January – Five bomb threats in five days occur at Central, but nothing is found except a stick of dynamite without a fuse or cap and a few firecrackers.

14-15 February – Businessman William F. Rector says that New Jersey interests backed out of a proposed \$10 million shopping center because of the integration trouble. Governor Faubus denies the allegation; he claims that Rector is an integrationist and a Republican. Rector calls the governor a skunk.

17 February – Minnijean Brown is expelled from Central. She has been involved in more incidents than any of the other black students. Sammie Dean Parker, a white student, is suspended for pushing Gloria Ray, one of the nine, down a flight of stairs; and two white boys are suspended for showing cards saying “One down, eight to go.” Minnijean says she is being punished for calling a girl “white trash” after the other girl hit her.

20 March – The Pine Bluff school board says that it is postponing indefinitely its plans for integration because of the trouble in Little Rock.

25 May – The first African-American student to graduate from Central High School is Ernest Green. Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is in attendance at the ceremony as a guest of the Green family.

28 May – the Mother’s League of Central High holds a party to celebrate the de-federalization of the National Guard and cites the *Arkansas Gazette* “for betraying Little Rock and the South” by the way it covered the Little Rock story.

3 June – In federal court nine Little Rock school officials testify that the previous year was one of chaos and tension at Central: that the educational program had been disrupted, that an extra financial burden had been placed on the School Board and that the board could see no prospect for improvement if integration were continued in September 1958. The testimony is for a delay of 2-1/2 years for integration in Little Rock.

4 June – As the hearing continues, School Board president Wayne Upton testifies that the January 1961 date chosen to resume integration in Little Rock was selected partly because the board thought Governor Faubus would be out of office by then. Little Rock Superintendent Virgil T. Blossom testifies that the School Board encountered “total opposition” from all three branches of the state government.

21 June – The federal court grants a delay until January 1961 for integration of Little Rock schools (known as the “Lemley delay”).

26 June – The NAACP asks the U.S. Supreme Court to bypass the 8<sup>th</sup> Circuit Appeals Court and take emergency action on the Lemley delay.

30 June – Supreme Court sends the Lemley case back to the Appeals Court for action.

4 August – The Lemley case is argued before the 8<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals.

18 August – The Appeals Court sets aside the Lemley delay order, writing that “the time has not yet come in these United States when an order of a federal court must be whittled away, watered down or shamefully withdrawn on the face of violent and unlawful acts of citizens.”

21 August – The Appeals Court stays for 30 days the effect of its order overruling the Lemley delay in order for the School Board to appeal to the Supreme Court. The School Board announces it will open segregated schools on September 21.

23 August – Governor Faubus calls a special session to start August 26 to deal with the integration problem.

25 August – The Supreme Court announces that it will take up the Little Rock integration matter during a special session on August 28. The School Board announces that the start of school will be delayed until September 8.

26 August – Governor Faubus addresses the legislature, saying that the federal government has no power in the integration issue: there are no laws concerning integration and the states did not give that power to the federal government. He offered six proposed laws, including one that would allow him to close the public high schools. An old law still on the books would allow the buildings to be leased out as private schools.

28 August – The Supreme Court delays hearing arguments until September 11.

1 September – The Board of Directors decides to delay the opening of the high schools until September 15 because of the Supreme Court delay, but opens the other schools on time on September 4.

12 September – The Supreme Court decrees unanimously that integration must proceed in Little Rock. Then events occur in the following order:

- 1) The School Board orders the high schools to open integrated on September 15.
- 2) One board member, Henry Rath, resigns in protest of the ruling.
- 3) Governor Faubus signs into law the school closing bill (Act 4).
- 4) Governor Faubus signs all of the special session legislation.
- 5) Governor Faubus orders the four high schools (Central, Hall, Technical and Mann) closed as of 8 a.m., September 15.

About 150 special deputy federal marshals arrive in Little Rock to help enforce the Supreme Court's ruling.

The 1958-59 school year, with no classes held in the public high schools, is commonly referred to as "The Lost Year."

17 September – With the counsel of Governor Faubus, six people incorporate the Little Rock Private School Corporation and say they plan to lease the public school buildings and open private schools. The Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools is formed to solicit votes "for integration" in the special election on September 27.

18 September – Governor Faubus makes an appeal for votes "against integration" in the election. The Private School Corporation says it doesn't know yet how it is going to finance its operations, but it has the promise of state accreditations for its schools.

22 September – The first day of two-hour television classes for Little Rock high school students is deemed a success by most participants. All three local television channels are involved: one broadcasts lessons for tenth grade, one for eleventh and one for twelfth.

27 September – Votes are 19,470 to 7,561 against "immediate integration of all schools." Governor Faubus says he will act with all dispatch to open the public schools as private schools. The NAACP goes to Appeals Court to prevent this.

29 September – The School Board leases its closed high schools to the Private School Corporation, but within hours the Appeals Court enjoins the board from going through with the transaction. The Supreme Court says that "evasive schemes for segregation" cannot be used to nullify court orders.

17 October – The Private School Corporation leases a building at 16<sup>th</sup> and Lewis streets formerly used by the University of Arkansas Graduate Center at Little Rock. This private school will be named T.J. Raney High School. About 750 students will attend Raney. Two additional privately operated facilities – Baptist High School, located at 8th and Scott streets, and Trinity Interim Academy – enrolls more displaced high school students.

22 October – Seniors attend their first day of classes at Raney High School, and registration of juniors and sophomores begins.

4 November – Orval Faubus is elected to his third two-year term as governor, garnering 83 percent of the vote against Republican George W. Johnson.

10 November – The three-judge panel of the Appeals Court orders the School Board to take positive steps toward integration on instructions that they will receive from the district judge and also on their own initiative.

12 November – Five School Board members, all but Dr. Dale Alford, vote to buy out Superintendent Virgil T. Blossom's contract, then they resign from the board. They call their position hopeless and helpless. Alford does not resign, but his term will be over on December 6; he has been elected to the state legislature and does not seek re-election to the board.

13 November – A lawsuit is filed in Chancery Court of Pulaski County to prevent the payment of the buy-out money to Blossom.

15 November – Fifteen candidates file for the School Board election on the final day of eligibility.

17 November – The State Department of Education begins making payments of \$24.50 per month per student to schools outside the district for educating Little Rock high school students.

6 December – In the School Board election, three members of the “businessman's” slate (Ted L. Lamb, Everett Tucker, Jr., and Russell H. Matson, Jr.) and three who promise to cooperate with Governor Faubus (Ben Rowland, Sr., Robert W. Laster and Ed I. McKinley) win election.

18 December – Terrell E. Powell, the principal at Hall High School, is appointed Superintendent to succeed Virgil T. Blossom.

22 December – The State Supreme Court upholds the Bennett ordinance on appeal, meaning that the NAACP must open its records. The NAACP says it will appeal to the decision.

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