

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS
CENTRAL DIVISION**

LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT, *et al.*

PLAINTIFFS

No. 4:82-cv-866-DPM

**PULASKI COUNTY SPECIAL SCHOOL
DISTRICT, JACKSONVILLE/NORTH
PULASKI SCHOOL DISTRICT, *et al.***

DEFENDANTS

**EMILY McCLENDON, TAMARA EACKLES,
VALERIE STALLINGS, TIFFANY ELLIS,
and LINDA MORGAN**

INTERVENORS

ORDER

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock has decided to discontinue its administration of the Dr. Charles W. Donaldson Scholars Academy. The last cohort of students supported by the program entered in the fall of 2020. The Donaldson Academy did not survive COVID and personnel attrition. At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, when the program will close, an estimated \$1.45 million will remain of the \$10 million contributed by the Pulaski County Special School District and the Jacksonville North Pulaski County School District. UALR seeks guidance on how to handle the leftover money. The Districts move the Court to approve a refund of the remainder to them (80% PCSSD and 20% JNPSD), with the refund dedicated to helping pay for the Court-ordered facilities projects.

The McClendon Intervenors oppose this step. They suggest using the money for another college-preparatory program and for scholarships for former Donaldson Academy participants who dropped out of college but have committed to re-enrolling.

No perfect solution exists for this unanticipated development. A decade ago, the Districts committed \$10 million for the Donaldson Academy as part of their many efforts at achieving unitary status in student achievement. They are now unitary in that area of Plan 2000. So the Court must hesitate at imposing any new obligation. But, because the matter involves an obligation already undertaken, which cannot now be honored 100%, the Court must address the unforeseen circumstances. Both PCSSD and JNPSD have comprehensive college preparatory programs. These are ACT-focused. These programs track the original goals of the Donaldson Academy. The duplicative program proposed by Intervenors is unlikely to add much. This leaves the college-scholarship and programs slice. The Court appreciates the Intervenors' willingness to be involved in that recruiting folks to return to college. But the obligations attendant on managing, disbursing, and monitoring more than a million dollars for scholarships would be many. Plus the scholars would not have the supportive group activities provided through UALR and the Donaldson Academy. Last, the Districts' proposal is sound. They're

in the short rows but remain under Court supervision on facilities. Both districts have undertaken substantial projects: PCSSD is improving Mills University High School in many commendable ways; while JNPSD is almost done with a complete rebuild of all its facilities except its kindergarten/pre-k center. As the Court has said, this has been an extraordinary effort. Construction costs have increased during the work on all these PCSSD/JNPSD projects. Channeling the Donaldson Academy refund in support of those efforts, which benefit minority students and all students, makes good sense.

The Districts' motion, *Doc. 5834*, is granted. UALR must refund all remaining Dr. Charles W. Donaldson Scholars Academy funds to the Pulaski County Special School District (80%) and the Jacksonville North Pulaski County School District (20%) within a reasonable time after 30 June 2024. The Court also requests UALR to account to the Districts, in due course, for how the rest of the Donaldson Academy money was spent. As the Interveners suggest, this report will provide useful information.

So Ordered.

D.P. Marshall Jr.
D.P. Marshall Jr.
United States District Judge

18 April 2024