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## School plan unveiled

### Nassif: Proposal will not take effect next school year

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Bambi Polotzola carefully studied the pages of a letter from U.S. Department of Justice attorney Lisa Taylor Wednesday, outlining a plan to desegregate the St. Landry Parish School District through the consolidation, closure and rezoning of schools.

Polotzola's children are counted in the more than 6,000 of the 15,300 students who could be impacted by the plan.

"It's going to kick my kids out of the schools that they're zoned in," Polotzola said as she studied the plan standing in the hallway of the board's supplemental resource center.

Following federal court orders, the proposed reorganization plan was released to the public shortly after 4 p.m. Wednesday during at special meeting of the St. Landry Parish School Board.

Polotzola's children are zoned to attend Port Barre High School.

But if the St. Landry Parish School Board adopts the plan, Polotzola's children will attend Opelousas High School.

Superintendent Michael Nassif said now that the plan is public, the board can either accept it as is, modify it or totally disregard it. No vote was taken on the plan Wednesday.

According to Taylor's letter, the Justice Department is requesting the school district "inform the United States by no later than July 9, 2008 of whether it intends to implement the proposed plan."

After the meeting, Nassif said the proposed plan would go into affect for the 2009-10 school year if adopted.

"We can't physically get ready that quick," Nassif said of next school year.

Standing behind a podium, Nassif read the plan to an audience of teachers, principals and parents.

The plan is divided into two parts - elementary schools and high schools. The proposed plan requires the eventual construction of a new school, subject to a bond election in the area, between Grand Prairie and Washington and north of Plaisance.

It also requires the construction of a new Port Barre High School and a new school east of Interstate 49 that will cater to all students zoned for Creswell Elementary and will take a portion of Leonville, Port Barre Elementary and South Street Elementary attendance zones.

The plan would require the eventual closure of Creswell Elementary and North Central High School.

"It is not the time to panic," Nassif said. "It's not a time for rash decisions. It's a time for patience, understanding, collaboration and cooperation."

For the high schools, OHS will expand its zone to take in students living in Beau Chene's southern zone and it will extend east into Port Barre's zone. According to the proposal, the attendance zone for grade 9-12 at Port Barre High School will be affected.

Polotzola said she believes OHS is a good school, but she was left with the thought that her children will be separated from their friends. That can be traumatic, she said.

As part of the proposed plan, more black students will be assigned to attend Eunice High School, and Northwest High school will receive more white students.

U.S. District Court Judge Tucker Melancon already called the plan constitutional and educationally sound. The St. Landry Parish School Board has 120 days to submit any modifications or a new plan.

Any modifications must be approved by the justice department and Melancon.

With the plan in hand and heads down, the audience at the meeting quickly flipped through it as Nassif read it word-for-word.

He read that the proposal calls for the consolidation of majority-black elementary schools in Morrow, Palmetto and Melville.

Under the plan, the schools would form one kindergarten through eighth-grade school located at what is now North Central High School. Its students will be rezoned to Port Barre High and Northwest High School.

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On the west side of the parish, majority-black Washington Elementary and Plaisance Elementary schools would be consolidated with majority-white Grand Prairie Elementary School in a two-phase process.

The first phase calls for the creation of a single attendance zone for the three schools and the reconfiguration of the schools to split grade levels among them.

The second phase requires the construction of a new school. Arnaudville Elementary and Grand Coteau Elementary will share a single attendance zone with grade levels split between the two schools. Cankton and Sunset could face a similar scenario.

South Street Elementary School teacher Crystal Compos said she hoped a decision will be reached soon so parents will know where their children will go to school, which supplies to get and what uniforms they need to buy.

Teachers also need their assignments, she said.

After the meeting, Creswell Elementary School teacher Shonia Lloyd was left wondering what would happen to teachers at her school.

"I think it's an OK plan for what I see so far, but my concern is what is going to happen to the teachers at Creswell when they build a new school or close the school down," she said.

"They're taking the little children and taking them to Plaisance - the babies," said Rocky Declouette, a school janitor and head of district's support workers union. Declouette said it doesn't make sense to combine schools in Morrow, Melville and Palmetto. He said he doubts the parish will get residents to approve a tax to build a new school.

Principal Elsie Semien said parents may have a hard time swallowing a proposal that requires the

bussing of small children to schools outside of their community.

"For pre-K through 3 not to be able to attend their neighborhood school, I think that's a problem," Semien said standing among a group of parents and teachers.

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