

Hoots v. Commonwealth (CV 71-538)
Judge Gerald Weber
Judge Maurice Cohill

The Woodland Hills School District was created as the result of a federal desegregation case that was pending in the Western District of Pennsylvania for more than thirty years. This case brought dramatic changes to the lives and education of children residing in the constituent communities, which were located in the eastern suburbs of Pittsburgh.

The case was filed in 1971 as a class action brought on behalf of parents and children residing in the former General Braddock School District. Several Pennsylvania statutes required the consolidation of small school districts. The suit alleged that Pennsylvania had approved several mergers of predominantly white districts while combining the predominantly black districts into the General Braddock School District.

The matter was initially assigned to Judge Gerald Weber, who concluded in 1974 that the mergers had constituted *de jure* discrimination, and that a remedy was required. For several years, the parties unsuccessfully sought to craft a proper remedy. In 1981, Judge Weber ordered several school districts to consolidate into a new district, which is presently known as the Woodland Hills School District.

The parties and the Court subsequently wrestled with a number of related issues, including school building renovations, closings, attendance patterns and grade restructuring. The issues surrounding the physical infrastructure located within the District were largely resolved by the late 1980's, causing the focus of the litigation to shift to matters such as curriculum design, student discipline, teacher training and supportive educational programs.

Judge Weber passed away in 1989, and the case was reassigned to Judge Cohill. Judge Cohill subsequently appointed Mark Fatla, Esquire, to serve as a Special Master to administer the litigation. A six-week non-jury trial was conducted in 1990. After the trial, Fatla issued a report and recommendation concerning a wide array of remedies. The report and recommendation was generally adopted by the Court. The United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit later affirmed the decision adopting the report and recommendation.

The Woodland Hills School District was granted partial unitary status in 2000, with the Court retaining jurisdiction over a limited range of issues. Jurisdiction was ultimately relinquished in 2003, when the District was granted full unitary status.