

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF KANSAS

Merrier A. Jackson Tartt v. Unified School District No. 475

Tartt · No. 23-2146-EFM · Decided February 12, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Kansas grants Unified School District No. 475’s motion for summary judgment on remand in Merrier A. Jackson Tartt’s Title VII racial discrimination claim. The court concludes that, even considering the portions of an affidavit identified by the Tenth Circuit and additional evidence, Tartt failed to show that the stated reasons for nonrenewal of her contract were pretextual.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Eric F. Melgren
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
DECIDED	February 12, 2026
DOCKET	23-2146-EFM
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved for summary judgment on remand after the Tenth Circuit reversed in part and remanded for reconsideration of Plaintiff's Title VII discrimination claim.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is appropriate when the movant shows that there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and that the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court views the evidence and reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, but conclusory allegations are insufficient to create a genuine issue for trial.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court memorandum and order
PARTIES	Merrier A. Jackson Tartt v. Unified School District No. 475

TOPICS

- employment discrimination
- title vii
- racial discrimination
- summary judgment
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether, after considering the previously disregarded portions of Toomey's affidavit and the remanded allegations concerning racism by Board members, Plaintiff presented sufficient evidence of pretext to avoid summary judgment on her Title VII racial-discrimination claim.
2. Whether differences in the timing and number of evaluations between Plaintiff and other administrators, inconsistencies in Board members' testimony, and alleged racist comments established a nexus between racial bias and the Board's decision not to renew Plaintiff's contract.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff failed to present evidence from which a reasonable factfinder could conclude that Defendant's legitimate, nondiscriminatory reasons for not renewing her contract were pretextual. Defendant was therefore entitled to summary judgment on the Title VII discrimination claim.
2. Plaintiff's failure to receive an evaluation while serving as an interim principal did not establish pretext because the identified white administrators were not similarly situated, and Plaintiff received an evaluation after becoming a regular principal.
3. The alleged racist comments did not create a genuine issue of material fact because Plaintiff failed to show that the speakers participated in the nonrenewal decision or that the comments were connected to that decision.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A plaintiff may show pretext by identifying “such weaknesses, implausibilities, inconsistencies, incoherencies, or contradictions” in a defendant’s proffered reasons for termination such “that a reasonable factfinder could rationally find them unworthy of credence and hence infer that the employer did not act for the asserted nondiscriminatory reasons.”” (at 7)

“The relevant inquiry is not whether the employer’s proffered reasons were wise, fair or correct, but whether it honestly believed those reasons and acted in good faith upon those beliefs.” (at 7)

“To meet her pretextual burden through such circumstantial evidence, Plaintiff “must show some nexus between the circumstantial evidence and [the] decision to terminate.”” (at 10)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Merrier A. Jackson Tartt, an African American woman, served as interim principal and later principal of Junction City High School within Unified School District No. 475. During the 2021–2022 school year, the district received complaints about her relationships with administrators and staff, she received mixed evaluation results, and the superintendent recommended that she resign. After reviewing her evaluation and hearing complaints, the seven-member Board unanimously voted not to renew her contract. Tartt argued that the stated reasons were

pretextual and that evidence concerning evaluations and racist comments by Board members supported an inference of racial discrimination.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff sued Unified School District No. 475 under 42 U.S.C. § 1981 and Title VII, alleging racial discrimination and retaliation. The Court previously granted Defendant summary judgment after finding that Plaintiff established a prima facie case but failed to show pretext. The Tenth Circuit largely affirmed, but reversed the decision to disregard portions of Plaintiff's affidavit and remanded for further consideration of the Title VII discrimination claim. On remand, the district court considered the specified affidavit portions and allegations concerning racism by Board members, again granted summary judgment to Defendant, and closed the case.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- *Tartt v. Unified Sch. Dist. No. 475*, 2024 WL 3362340 (D. Kan. July 10, 2024)
- *Tartt v. Unified Sch. Dist. No. 475*, 2024 WL 3328576 (D. Kan. July 8, 2024)
- *Tartt v. Unified Sch. Dist. No. 475*, 2025 WL 1779732 (10th Cir. June 27, 2025)
- *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792 (1973)
- *Haynes v. Level 3 Commc'ns, LLC*, 456 F.3d 1215, 1219 (10th Cir. 2006)
- *Bennett v. Quark, Inc.*, 258 F.3d 1220, 1224 (10th Cir. 2001)
- *Thom v. Bristol-Myers Squibb Co.*, 353 F.3d 848, 851 (10th Cir. 2003)
- *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 322–23 (1986)
- *Garrison v. Gambro, Inc.*, 428 F.3d 933, 935 (10th Cir. 2005)
- *Mitchell v. City of Moore*, 218 F.3d 1190, 1197 (10th Cir. 2000)
- *Adler v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 144 F.3d 664, 670–71 (10th Cir. 1998)
- *LifeWise Master Funding v. Telebank*, 374 F.3d 917, 927 (10th Cir. 2004)
- *Carter v. Pathfinder Energy Servs., Inc.*, 662 F.3d 1134, 1141 (10th Cir. 2011)
- *Lobato v. N.M. Env't Dept.*, 733 F.3d 1283, 1289 (10th Cir. 2013)
- *Luster v. Vilsack*, 667 F.3d 1089, 1093–95 (10th Cir. 2011)
- *Kendrick v. Penske Transp. Servs., Inc.*, 220 F.3d 1220, 1232 (10th Cir. 2000)
- *English v. Colo. Dep't of Corr.*, 248 F.3d 1002, 1010 (10th Cir. 2001)
- *Smith v. Potter*, 252 F. App'x 224, 228 (10th Cir. 2007)
- *Harrison v. Wahatoyas, L.L.C.*, 253 F.3d 552, 558 (10th Cir. 2001)
- *Sasser v. Salt Lake City Corp.*, 772 F. App'x 651, 662 (10th Cir. 2019)
- *Bones v. Honeywell Int'l, Inc.*, 366 F.3d 869, 875 (10th Cir. 2004)

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