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Court OKs Deal Over Discipline In Mississippi School

By Holbrook Mohr
The Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A federal judge approved a deal Thursday between the U.S. Justice Department and a Mississippi school district to end discriminatory disciplinary practices in which black students face harsher punishment than whites for similar misbehavior, authorities said.

The deal, reached in March with the Meridian Public School District and approved Thursday, followed a lengthy federal investigation that found that black public school students there are five times more likely than whites to be suspended from classes and often got longer suspensions for comparable misbehavior.

The agreement is separate from a Justice Department lawsuit that alleges that there was a "school-to-prison pipeline" in Meridian that locked up students for minor infractions like flatulence or wearing the wrong color socks.

Jocelyn Samuels, a deputy assistant attorney general, said in a statement that the school deal approved Thursday "will propel meaningful reform in Meridian schools and serve as a blueprint for school districts across the country."

About 86 percent of Meridian's 6,000 public school students are black. The district's superintendent, Alvin Taylor, is black and there is a mixture of white and black principals, Samuels has said.

that removes students from classrooms and ensure that consequences are fair and consistent for all students.

The agreement would amend a consent decree enforced by the U.S. as part of a 1965 desegregation lawsuit against the district.

Samuels has said there were about 200 similar longstanding lawsuits involving districts around the country and the Justice Department reviews their disciplinary policies and practices.

During a news conference in March, she said disciplinary problems and disparities are not unique to the city of Meridian or Mississippi and she hoped the agreement can be a guide to other school districts.

"This consent decree is a major stride toward equal justice and equal opportunity for all students in Meridian," U.S. Attorney Gregory K. Davis said in a statement.

The Justice Department said the district has already started to implement some conditions in the consent decree.

Among the requirements, the district must "monitor discipline data to identify and respond to racial disparities," the Justice Department said.

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districts across the country."

—Jocelyn Samuels

After hours calls to Taylor's office on Thursday were not answered.

The lawsuit over jailed students is filed against the city of Meridian, Lauderdale County, the two Lauderdale County Youth Court judges and the Mississippi Department of Human Services. That lawsuit, which is pending in U.S. District Court in Jackson, claims Meridian police routinely arrested students without determining whether there was probable cause when a school wanted to press charges, and the students were routinely jailed.

Once arrested, the students end up on probation, sometimes without proper legal representation, according to the lawsuit. If the students are on probation, future school problems could be considered a violation that requires them to serve the suspension incarcerated in the juvenile detention center.

That means students can be incarcerated for "dress code infractions such as wearing the wrong color socks or undershirt, or for having shirts untucked; tardies; flatulence in class; using vulgar language; yelling at teachers; and going to the bathroom or leaving the classroom without permission."

The agreement between the Justice Department and the Meridian district, known as a consent decree, calls for the district to fully comply with several measures to end discriminatory punishment by the end of the 2016-2017 school year.

Among the provisions in the 44-page agreement, the school would have to limit the use of disciplinary action

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REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

General Contractor

Affordable Community Environments
2155 West Firestone Lane, Suite 103
Vancouver, WA 98666

STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS due: No later than **4:00 p.m. Thursday, June 20, 2013**

Affordable Community Environments (ACE) is issuing a Request For Qualifications (RFQ) for a general contractor whom ACE, through a to be created Limited Partnership, will negotiate for a stipulated sum contract or a guaranteed maximum price contract for the construction of the NE 62nd Avenue Senior Housing Apartments Phase I (Project). The Project is a 45 unit senior housing project in a single building with surface parking, landscaped areas and other site improvements located at 3112 NE 62nd Avenue in Vancouver, Washington. This is the first of a two phased development.

The Contractor will participate with the project team in an integrated design process including completion of architectural plans and specifications, project scheduling, value engineering, construction sequencing, and coordination of competitive bidding for subcontractors.

The General Contractor will be required to follow specific funding requirements from HUD, Washington State Housing Finance Commission, State of Washington Housing Trust Fund, City of Vancouver HOME and CDBG programs and Clark County HOME programs.

To be considered as a potential General Contractor, respondents must submit a STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS pursuant to the RFQ package which may be obtained by contacting Leah Greenwood, ACE Housing Development Project Manager

via e-mail at lgreenwood@reachcdc.org.

6-5-13