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DEPARTMENTS OF JUSTICE AND EDUCATION RESOLVE HARASSMENT ALLEGATIONS IN ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN MINNESOTA

WASHINGTON – The Departments of Justice and Education, together with six private student plaintiffs and the Anoka-Hennepin School District, filed a proposed consent decree today in the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota, resolving complaints of sex-based harassment of middle and high school students in the school district. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 each prohibits sex-based harassment, including harassment based on nonconformity with gender stereotypes and sexual harassment.

In November 2010, the Department of Justice received a complaint alleging that students in the school district were being harassed by other students because they didn't dress or act in ways that conform to gender stereotypes. The Departments of Justice and Education conducted an extensive investigation into sex-based harassment in the district's middle and high schools. Many students reported that the unsafe and unwelcoming school climate inhibited their ability to learn. The parties worked collaboratively to draft a consent decree addressing and resolving the allegations in the complaints.

If approved by the court, the consent decree will ensure that the school district:

- Retains an expert consultant in the area of sex-based harassment to review the district's policies and procedures concerning harassment;
- Develops and implements a comprehensive plan for preventing and addressing student-on-student sex-based harassment at the middle and high schools;
- Enhances and improves its training of faculty, staff and students on sex-based harassment;
- Hires or appoints a Title IX coordinator to ensure proper implementation of the district's sex-based harassment policies and procedures and district compliance with Title IX;
- Retains an expert consultant in the area of mental health to address the needs of students who are victims of harassment;
- Provides for other opportunities for student involvement and input into the district's ongoing anti-harassment efforts;
- Improves its system for maintaining records of investigations and responding to allegations of harassment;
- Conducts ongoing monitoring and evaluations of its anti-harassment efforts; and

- Submits annual compliance reports to the departments.

The consent decree will remain in place for five years.

“Harassment by or against students in schools is unacceptable, and not a ‘rite of passage’ to be endured by anyone. Parents are entitled to know that their children will be safe in school every day,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “We commend the Anoka-Hennepin School District for its willingness to tackle sex-based harassment and for working collaboratively with the federal government to address concerns across the district. We hope the district will become a model for schools nationwide by providing a safe and nurturing learning environment for all students free from bullying and harassment.”

B. Todd Jones, U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota , said, “Nearly 40,000 students in the Anoka-Hennepin School District will benefit from this consent decree. Schools must be safe places for all students. Bullying of any kind cannot be tolerated. To that end, the Anoka-Hennepin School District took great strides today.”

As Russlynn Ali, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Education recognized, “If students aren’t safe, then students aren’t learning. Bullying, sexual harassment and gender stereotyping of any student, including LGBT students, have no place in our nation’s schools. We must work to stop those abusive behaviors when they take place, repair their harmful effects and prevent them from happening in the future. The Department of Education is committed to working with Anoka-Hennepin School District to ensure that the environment in District schools is safe and welcoming for all students and that the measures now being taken by the District are effective in preventing and addressing any future harassment.”

The enforcement of Title IV and Title IX are top priorities of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorney Offices. Additional information about the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department is available on its website at www.justice.gov/crt/. Additional information about the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Minnesota is available on its website at www.justice.gov/usao/mn.

The enforcement of Title IX is a top priority of the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Additional information about the Office for Civil Rights is available on its website at www2.ed.gov/ocr.

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