

**PRESS RELEASE**

Justice Department Reaches Agreement with Alabama School District to End the Use of Race in Extracurricular Activities

Friday, August 3, 2012

For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

The Justice Department announced today that it reached an out-of-court agreement with the Escambia County School District in Alabama to end the use of race-based selection criteria for homecoming courts and other student activities in two of the district's high schools.

In response to the department's inquiry earlier this year, the district indicated that two of its high schools considered race in certain student elections. Escambia County High School permitted students to elect two homecoming queens and two homecoming attendants, one African-American and one not. Another school, W.S. Neal High School, had a similar longstanding practice of using race-based criteria for election of students to its Valentine's Day courts.

To resolve the department's concerns over these practices, the Escambia County Board of Education voluntarily adopted a district-wide non-discrimination policy for extracurricular activities. The policy will end the use of race-based election and selection criteria in all student activities. The agreement requires the district to fully implement and enforce its new non-

discrimination policy, to notify parents and students of changes to student election practices and to provide compliance reports to the department for at least one year.

“We commend the Escambia County Board of Education for acting swiftly to abolish the use of race in student activities and to ensure that no student is denied participation in any extracurricular activity based on race,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “It is time for the once common practice of segregating students by race in school activities to come to an end.”

The use of race-based selection and election criteria in public schools’ extracurricular activities, including homecoming courts, proms and similar activities is prohibited by Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bars public school districts, colleges and universities from discriminating against students on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex and religion. The department has challenged such practices in a number of school districts over the years, including, most recently, settling with the Nettleton School District in Mississippi in 2011 to abolish race-based selection and election procedures for class officers, homecoming courts and student superlatives.

The enforcement of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in school districts is a top priority of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. Additional information about the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department is available on its Web site at www.justice.gov/crt.

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Components

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