Transferred students, district settle

*St. Louis Public Schools will clear records of suspension, but students cannot immediately return to Soldan.*

By Jane Coaston, May 8, 2010

Two students who were suspended from Soldan High School in September and transferred to an alternative education program reached a final settlement with St. Louis Public Schools on Thursday.

In the settlement, St. Louis Public Schools agreed to expunge the records of both students of the incident leading to their suspension and to review the district's disciplinary policies for short-term suspension and transfers. But the students were denied in their effort to immediately return to Soldan.

The lawsuit against St. Louis Public Schools charged that the students were unlawfully transferred to an alternative education program, ACE Credit Recovery, and that the educational environment there was 'substandard.'

Specifically, the students were concerned that their education in the alternative education program left them unprepared for college. They alleged that classes lasted for three hours daily and involved virtually no teacher involvement. About 400 St. Louis Public Schools students participate in the alternative program that was the focus of the lawsuit. ACE was not mentioned in the settlement.

According to court documents, the students — who are not named in the suit — were suspended after attempting to trip and interfere with police who were called to the school to stop a fight.

The terms of the settlement state that the students, a senior and a junior in high school, will remain at ACE for the rest of the school year.

The senior will be able to receive 40 hours of individualized college counseling and assistance, attend graduation ceremonies at Soldan and have her records indicate that she attended Soldan. Before her graduation from Soldan, the senior will be transferred to a different teacher at ACE.

The junior will be enrolled in Gateway Institute of Technology next year and will be permitted to graduate from Gateway.

The settlement states that if either runs afoul of the rules in the future, the student will have an opportunity to meet with the superintendent to determine whether records from their initial suspension should still be expunged.

The school district also agreed to review its policies for short-term suspension and discipline using proposals prepared by the Washington University School of Law Civil Justice Clinic and Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, which represented the plaintiffs. And the director of alternative education for the district, Betty Shackleford, will attend an "access to equal justice" colloquium held by Washington University School of Law.

Based on the terms of the settlement, neither party was able to comment on its details. But Dan Underwood, an attorney from Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, applauded the outcome.

"This settlement is the beginning of a dialogue with (the school district) that will benefit all the district students," he said in a written statement.