

SOPER - Following a federal court case alleging that Soper Schools violated Title IX laws requiring that girls athletic programs be funded equitably with boys' programs, Soper Independent School District has agreed to pay attorney fees in the amount of \$13,000 and make changes to bring the schools' athletic programs into conformity with federal Title IX regulations.

Plaintiffs in the case included several parents of female students, including Danny and Terresa Gallant, Kenneth Phillips, Cheryl Trent, Issac Frazier and Kolette Frazier.

The settlement agreement was ratified on June 8, 2009, after four parents brought suit in federal court in Muskogee. In the agreement, Soper Schools agree to:

- * Comply with the general mandates of Title IX, its regulations and its interpretive guidance.

- * ... to equitably support boys and girls sports, and that the district understands that girls and boys in school sponsored sports are entitled to be treated equitably regardless of the source of revenues utilized to support girls and boys athletics.

- * The school district will provide male and female students access to the district's weight room on a gender-neutral basis. Individual coaches will be responsible for determining the level of strength and conditioning training appropriate for athletes under their supervision.

- * The school district shall provide equipment and supplies to female teams and programs that are of like quality to equipment and supplies provided to the district's male athletes, teams and programs. Additionally, the district shall provide uniforms on a gender neutral basis. The district does not provide shoes to athletes, but if it ever makes shoes available, it shall do so without regard to gender.

- * Plaintiffs agree to promptly notify an appropriate school official if they believe school facilities are not being made available to children on a gender-neutral basis.

- * Female athletes are to be treated in the same manner as male athletes with respect to travel privileges and travel support, and both shall be treated in a comparable manner as to travel arrangements, lodging and meals.

- * Soper shall provide comparable athletic facilities for male and female athletes. Facilities shall be available to student athletes on a gender-neutral basis. Soper shall ensure that girls' and boys' teams have equivalent dressing and locker room facilities. The girls and boys basketball teams shall alternate use of the areas

located under the bleachers in the gym for dressing rooms. Girls shall have use of the dressing area on the west side of the Soper gym beginning with the 2009-2010 school year; boys shall have use of the same area the following year, and shall alternate between boys and girls for as long as the areas located under the bleachers remains in use as dressing areas.

* Soper shall designate the west softball field as its girls' field. In addition, it shall construct a metal press box for this softball field that in all respects, with the exception of the building materials, be equal to the press box located on the baseball field. The press box shall be completed no later than Aug. 15, 2010. Dugouts located on the west softball field shall be one-half cinder block and one-half chain link, and completed by Aug. 1, 2010. Approximately 20 bags of Turface, or a comparable material, shall be applied to the west softball field.

* The school district shall provide for equivalent school promotion and publication of female sports and male sports programs, including pep assemblies or other team recognition.

* Plaintiff's attorneys shall be paid within 30 days following the execution of this settlement agreement, \$13,000. No other amounts, whether costs, fees, or expenses, shall be payable to Plaintiffs or their counsel in connection with this lawsuit.

The document is signed by Federal Judge, Frank A. Seay. Signing for the Soper Board of Education were Shawn Scott, Russell Moffatt, Athletic Director Monte Sill and Superintendent Olen Jestis.

One of the parents bringing the lawsuit told the Hugo Daily News the court action came as a result of the Soper district not demonstrating fairness and equality to the district's female athletes.

"We had to have fund raisers to gather enough money to purchase team items," Teresa Gallant said. "We we asked for funds from the district so the girls could have the same uniforms as the boys, we were constantly denied."

Efforts to reach a spokesperson for Soper Schools were unsuccessful.