

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

E.P. v. Tehachapi Unified School District

E.P. · No. 1:23-cv-01724-CDB · Decided March 17, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California approved in full an unopposed petition to approve the settlement of a minor’s federal and state law claims arising from alleged abuse by a special education teacher. The court found the \$125,000 settlement fair, reasonable, and in the child’s best interests, with attorney’s fees and costs deducted and the remaining proceeds deposited into a special needs trust. The order also required proof that the trust was funded and directed the parties to file a dismissal with prejudice.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	March 17, 2025
DOCKET	1:23-cv-01724-CDB
DISPOSITION	approved
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The minor plaintiff moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 17(c) and Eastern District of California Local Rule 202 for approval of an unopposed settlement resolving federal and state-law claims.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court independently evaluates a minor's settlement to determine whether it is fair, reasonable, and in the minor's best interests, including whether the net amount distributed to the minor is fair and reasonable in light of the facts, the minor's claims, and recoveries in similar cases.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished, nonprecedential district-court order
PARTIES	E.P., a minor, by and through his guardian ad litem, Michel Hernandez-Disla v. Tehachapi Unified School District, Jason Grimes, other defendants

TOPICS

- civil procedure
- ada / disability
- trusts
- estate planning
- probate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

education law

disability law

minor settlement approval

trusts and estates

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court should approve the proposed settlement of a minor's federal and state-law claims under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 17(c) and Local Rule 202.
2. Whether the proposed \$125,000 settlement, including the allocation for attorney's fees and costs and the deposit of the balance into a special-needs trust, is fair, reasonable, and in E.P.'s best interests.

HOLDINGS

1. A settlement or compromise of a minor's claims is not effective without court approval, and the court must independently assess whether the compromise protects the minor's interests even when the settlement is recommended or negotiated by the minor's parent or guardian ad litem.
2. The proposed \$125,000 settlement is fair, reasonable, and in E.P.'s best interests and is approved in full.
3. The requested \$25,000 allocation for attorney's fees and costs is approved.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“For the reasons stated below, the Court will approve in full the minor’s compromise as the settlement agreement is fair, reasonable, and in the best interests of the child.” (at 1)

“The Court is obligated to independently assess the fairness of a settlement even where the parent has recommended it.” (at 3)

“The proposed settlement amount presented by the parties here is aligned with or exceeds the recovery obtained with these other cases involving similar factual scenarios.” (at 8)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

E.P., a twelve-year-old child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, attended Tompkins Elementary School in the Tehachapi Unified School District. The complaint alleged that special-education teacher Jason Grimes repeatedly restrained, secluded, threatened, dragged, and otherwise physically and emotionally abused E.P. during the 2022-2023 school year, while other school employees failed to intervene or report the conduct to E.P.'s mother. E.P. alleged regression in behavior and functioning, including increased tantrums, aggression, and self-injurious behavior. The parties resolved the claims for \$125,000, with funds allocated to attorney's fees and costs, establishment of a special-needs trust, and E.P.'s net recovery.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

E.P. brought claims arising from alleged abuse by a special-education teacher, including claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, Title II of the ADA, California's Bane Act, and state tort and statutory law. The parties participated in a court-supervised settlement conference and reached a \$125,000 settlement. The court reviewed the petition, supporting declarations, settlement terms, attorney-fee request, and comparison cases, and approved the compromise in full.

DISPOSITION

approved

CASES CITED

- K.M. v. Tehachapi School District, No. 1:17-cv-01431-LJO-JLT, 2019 WL 991048, at *4 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 28, 2019)
- Robidoux v. Rosengren, 638 F.3d 1177, 1179 n.2, 1181-82 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Salmeron v. United States, 724 F.2d 1357, 1363 (9th Cir. 1983)
- Bravo v. United States, No. 1:14-cv-01004-AWI-JLT, 2016 WL 3418450, at *3 (E.D. Cal. June 22, 2016)
- J.J. v. Rocklin Unified Sch. Dist., No. 2:19-cv-01404-KJM-DB, 2020 WL 363908, at *3-4 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 22, 2020)
- Chance v. Prudential Ins. Co. of Am., No. 1:15-cv-01889-DAD-JLT, 2016 WL 3538345, at *3 (E.D. Cal. June 29, 2016)
- Timothy O v. Paso Robles Unified School Dist., 822 F.3d 1105, 1116 (9th Cir. 2016)
- J.T. v. Tehachapi Unified Sch. Dist., No. 1:16-cv-01492-DAD-JLT, 2016 WL 11812476, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 27, 2019)
- A.M.L. v. Cernaianu, No. LA CV12-06082 JAK (RZx), 2014 WL 12588992, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Apr. 1, 2014)
- Pearson v. Superior Court, 202 Cal. App. 4th 1333, 1330 (2012)
- Gonzalez v. Chula Vista Elem. Sch. Dist., No. 21-cv-1314-L-DDL, 2024 WL 1466784 (S.D. Cal. Apr. 3, 2024)
- F.R. v. Santa Clara Unified Sch. Dist., No. 23-cv-01840-BLF, 2024 WL 3696482 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 6, 2024)
- Vasquez v. Richland Sch. Dist., No. 1:19-cv-0327-JLT, 2021 WL 168343 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 19, 2021)
- A.M. v. San Juan Unified Sch. Dist., No. 2:16-cv-02380-KJM-KJN, 2018 WL 10436221 (E.D. Cal. Apr. 26, 2018)
- Warchol v. Kings Cnty. Office of Educ., No. 1:17-cv-00106-DAD-MJS, 2018 WL 1185053 (E.D. Cal. Mar. 7, 2018)