

# Jury rules against school district

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PICKENS — In a two-day trial held at the Pickens County Courthouse last week, jury members ruled that the School District of Pickens County must

award a former Pickens County school student \$2,500.

A one-time Daniel High School student had to leave school January 1999, after what his parents believed was negligence by school officials to properly deal with a group of

school mates who repeatedly harassed, or bullied, their son.

The lawsuit, filed by the student's parents David and Kathi Conner, stems from an incident that occurred in early fall, 1998. The Conners, along with their son, were tailgating at

a Clemson football game, when someone stole their son's bicycle. The police quickly apprehended the young suspect, who Mrs. Conner said attended R.C. Edwards at the time. The parents didn't pursue criminal charges, but the police did noti-

fy the boy's mother, who had to come pick him up.

From that moment, though, until the Conners pulled their son out of Daniel in the midst of his freshman year, they claim

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their son endured at times daily threats at school, and occasionally out of school, from the alleged bicycle thief and his friends at Daniel.

"I still feel we did the right thing," said Mr. Conner, about the lawsuit. "We did what any prudent parents would have done to protect their children." Mr. Conner said that further legal action against individual school officials involved in his son's case is still an option.

The money awarded to the Conners is compensation for the emotional stress their son underwent; as well, it will go towards the cost of moving him to Greenville County. But the issue was never about the money, Mr. Conner emphasized, as much as it was about the harassment.

"I wanted to make a statement that that stuff is not going to be tolerated," he said. "A school should be a safe place to go."

Papers provided by the Conners' lawyer, Stephen Henry, list several examples of how their son was continuously beleaguered, including threats of physical violence not only towards him but also against his girlfriend, and an episode where the unruly students once urinated in his gym locker. As well, the list states that while at the movies in Clemson, one of a group of harassing boys pointed a gun at their son.

Despite pleas by the Conners to Daniel High administrators, the parents feel the school did little, or nothing, to thwart the mistreatment by other Daniel students towards their child.

"It took three and a half years to get to court," said Mr. Conner. "The biggest thing was we were wanting to save another child from having to go through that."

Mr. Conner noted that Daniel didn't have a school resource officer then, but in the year after his son left, one was assigned to the school. When Mr. Conner asked why Daniel didn't have a resource officer, he said school officials expressed concern about the kind of image Daniel might receive if it had to rely on the skills of a trained police officer for safety.

Their son has since graduated from Eastside High School and is heading to college this fall on an athletics scholarship.