



Michelle Higginbotham / American Press

Students leave Sam Houston High on Wednesday after a day of classes at the Moss Bluff school. Enrollment figures for Calcasieu Parish public schools show a small decrease in the number of students for the 2012-2013 school year.

# McNeese on hook for \$1.45M

## Appeals court raises amount school must pay attorney from lawsuit

By **Johnathan Manning**  
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**Student Collette Covington sued McNeese State**

**University in 2001, alleging she suffered injuries while trying to open a door to exit a restroom.**

McNeese State University owes \$1.45 million in fees to an attorney who filed a civil rights lawsuit against the school, the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeal said in a ruling released Wednesday.

The appeals court increased a lower court's order that McNeese pay attorney Seth Hopkins just over \$1 million.

Hopkins was the lead attorney in a case brought against the school in 2001 by a student in a wheelchair, Collette Covington.

Covington sued McNeese, alleging she suffered injuries while trying to open the door to exit a restroom in the Old Ranch. The doorway, at its smallest point, measured 29 5/8 inches in width, less than the 32 inches the Americans with Disabilities Act requires, according to the 3rd Circuit's ruling.

McNeese settled with Covington, reportedly for \$400,000 and six years of free tuition.

Hopkins, who took the case pro bono after graduating law school in 1999, was seeking payment for the time he spent litigating the case, according to the appeals court.

In March 2011, Judge Mike Canaday ordered McNeese to pay Hopkins just over \$1 million — Canaday reduced his work hours by 20 percent

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# School enrollment slightly down

## Savoy still pleased with student numbers 'Considering we have two charter schools open now, this enrollment shows they're not coming from Calcasieu schools.'

By **Ashley Withers**  
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Enrollment has decreased slightly in Calcasieu Parish schools, according to Superintendent Wayne Savoy.

He said the 2012-2013 school enrollment is 32,645, down from 32,926 last year.

Despite the smaller number of students, Savoy said he is pleased with this year's enrollment.

"Considering we have two charter schools open now, this enrollment shows they're not coming from Calcasieu schools," he said.

Lake Charles Charter Academy has 766 students, and Southwest Louisiana Charter Academy has 534.

Savoy said one of the most likely reasons for the decrease is the loss of three prekindergarten classes in

the district.

"There were state cuts for that program. We had to make the adjustment and cut those classes."

Savoy said he expects the enrollment numbers across the district to fluctuate throughout the year.

"Kids move in and out all year long. Enrollment normally picks up during the

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**'Considering we have two charter schools open now, this enrollment shows they're not coming from Calcasieu schools.'**

**Wayne Savoy**

Calcasieu schools superintendent

# MCNEESE

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because he said Hopkins' legal inexperience, as well as his inexperience with laws related to the Americans with Disabilities Act, had increased his hours.

The 3rd circuit reinstated Hopkins' 5,489.5 billable hours and set an hourly rate of \$265.

In reinstating the full number of hours requested, the 3rd Circuit wrote, "We are firmly convinced Hopkins presented a well-orchestrated case worthy of emulation by

the most seasoned attorneys."

The appellate court also ordered McNeese to pay \$88,775 in attorney fees for work related to the appeal and \$57,249 in appeal costs.

It also set a judicial rate of interest of 9.5 percent on all attorney fees, from Feb. 24, 2011, until the fees are paid.

Furthermore, the appeals court declined a request by Covington to strike McNeese's reply brief from the record because even though it "does not comply with the rules," it "evidences the vitriolic behavior engaged in by McNeese on appeal," the ruling stated.