

# Lawyer: Mascot redo cost is \$265,000

DAVE HUGHES  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

FORT SMITH — It will cost the School District at least \$265,000 to switch out mascots for Southside High School, according to cost estimates released by an attorney suing the district.

Fort Smith attorney Joey McCutchen on Tuesday released the estimates he said he obtained from the district through an Arkansas Freedom of Information Act request.

He said taxpayers should know how much the district is planning to spend in adopting a new mascot.

McCutchen sued the School Board and district last month, saying they violated the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act by failing to notify the public of a special meeting held June 23, when a committee first voted to recommend the School Board change the mascot and

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fight song.

The suit is pending in Sebastian County Circuit Court.

The School Board voted unanimously July 27 to immediately eliminate the school's fight song, "Dixie," and to phase out the Rebel mascot by the start of the 2016-2017 school year.

According to the figures released to McCutchen, switching uniforms and equipment for the athletic teams and coaches, and for cheerleaders, drill team and the band will cost an estimated \$189,207.

It will cost the most to outfit the football team at nearly \$67,000. Of that, \$38,218 is estimated for the home and away uniforms.

Removing the Rebel mascot from school facilities is estimated to cost \$75,565, which includes \$55,000 for changing the Rebel emblem on the end zone and midfield, and \$18,000 to replace the emblem on the gym floor.

School Superintendent Benny Gooden told School Board members at the July 27 meeting there was sufficient money in a couple of unspecified activity funds to cover the expenses.

In a response to McCutchen's Freedom of Information Act request for documentation on where the money for the changes would come from, Gooden responded, "No documentation exists in this category."

Gooden was out of town and unavailable for comment Tuesday.

Several items on the list of facility changes didn't include costs. Among them were a press box sign, Rebel

wall paintings and signs, team banner, marching band banner, athletic trailer and stadium tunnel.

School district spokeswoman Zena Featherston said Tuesday those costs and others still were being researched.

She said authorization to spend money for the changes will not be sought until after the mascot committee has been chosen.

Southside Principal Wayne Haver, who's heading the mascot committee, has said membership on the committee won't be completed until around mid-September.

Gooden has the authority to spend up to a certain amount of money in certain situations without board approval, Featherston said. But, she said, she believed Gooden will keep the board informed on the expenditures and will solicit its wishes on the expenses.