

# Perry school district must pay \$3.5 million in sex predator case

by **TIM WILLERT**

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This June 5, 2018 booking photo released by Oklahoma Department of Corrections shows Arnold C. Cowen. A settlement has been reached in a federal lawsuit accusing an Oklahoma school district of shielding a sexual predator and calling children liars. Court documents show Perry Public Schools admitted liability for the "unwanted and unlawful touching" of 14 girls by a former teacher's aide and agreed to pay the families \$3.5 million. Arrest affidavits note the Perry Upper Elementary School students detailed how 87-year-old Arnold Cowen fondled them and touched their breasts in 2016 and 2017. (Oklahoma Department of Corrections via AP)

**PERRY** — Perry Public Schools has admitted liability for the "unwanted and unlawful touching" of 14 girls by a former teacher's aide and agreed to pay the families \$3.5 million to settle the case, court documents show.

School district officials were accused in a federal lawsuit of shielding a sexual predator and branding children as liars when they accused Arnold Cowen of molestation.

Cowen, 87, pleaded guilty in February to molesting 10 girls at Upper Elementary School in 2016 and 2017 and is serving a 10-year prison sentence. Four more girls came forward after the charges were filed against Cowen.

"There was no doubt that these children were molested and (the school district) admitted it," Cameron Spradling, one of the attorneys representing the victims, told *The Oklahoman* on Wednesday.

"There's no doubt that they were responsible for allowing that to happen. They did everything wrong."

John E. Priddy, the attorney representing the school district, could not immediately be reached for comment.

A portion of the settlement — \$683,427 — will be paid by the district's liability insurance carrier while the balance will come from a judgment against the district that will be paid over a three-year period, court documents show.

The lawsuit accused Perry school officials of failing to provide a safe learning environment for students and "an environment free of sexual predators" by not limiting his access to children.

One of those officials, the school's ex-principal, was put on five years' probation in March for failing to report the misconduct.

Kenda Miller, 51, pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor count of failure to promptly report child abuse or neglect after reaching a plea deal with prosecutors. She resigned in June 2017.

In April, former math teacher Jeffrey Sullins was put on five years' probation for failing to report the misconduct. Sullins, 52, also pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor count of failure to promptly report child abuse or neglect after reaching a plea deal with prosecutors. He resigned in June 2017.



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