

HOTCHKISS STUDENT CASE

\$4M award in Chinese tick bite incident

By Michael P. Mayko

BRIDGEPORT — A summer study program in China for a former student of The Hotchkiss School, an exclusive prep school in Litchfield County, changed a young woman's life forever, but for the worst.

Never again will Cara Munn, now 20, speak another word or be able to process information as quickly as she did before contracting encephalitis after a June 24, 2007, tick bite on a school hiking trip near Mount Pan-shan.

"She is a very highly intelligent woman," said her attorney, Antonio Ponvert, of Bridgeport's Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder law firm. "She's not able to speak an intelligible word. She will never be able to speak again."

At 1:30 p.m. Wednesday

— after about eight hours of deliberations — the jury of six women and two men awarded Munn and her parents \$41.7 million in damages against the exclusive 122-year old Hotchkiss School in Lakeville.

The award included \$31 million for emotional and psychological suffering, \$7.2 million for future medical care and rehabilitative treatment, \$2.5 million for lost earnings and \$450,000 for past medical expenses.

In his lawsuit, Ponvert charged Hotchkiss with negligence by failing to warn students and parents they could be subjected to insect-transmitted diseases in China, failing to ensure students took insect bite precautions before and during the trip, failing to include medical personnel on the trip, and failing to make advance arrangements to return any injured or ill students to the United States.

Lawyers for the school argued in court papers that such illnesses are so rare that they could not have foreseen a risk or be expected to issue advance warnings.

