

\$19 mil. award for boy hit by TV

ARCHDIOCESE | Fell on his head at school in 4th grade

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Mariano Hernandez was always eager to help others, so it was no surprise that the 9-year-old boy was at the front of his classroom, helping to move a TV cart.

But within seconds, the fourth-grader's life changed forever as the 27-inch television atop that cart came loose and smashed atop Mariano's head.

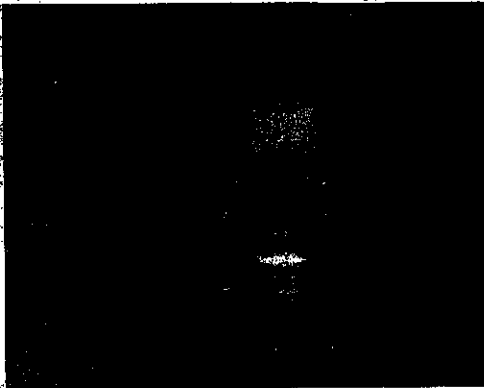
Monday, a Cook County jury awarded the boy \$19 million for the permanent brain injuries he has suffered since the accident happened in October 2003 at St. Genevieve Catholic School.

The verdict, against the Archdiocese of Chicago, which operates the school at 4846 W. Montana St., was reached after 90 minutes of deliberation from a two-week trial, said the family's attorney, Stephen Passen.

The money will help his parents, Carlos Hernandez and Sandra Yanez, provide the kind of therapy and care that Mariano will need for the rest of his life, they said.

But they say it won't bring back the same little boy who had dreams of being a firefighter, police officer or military man.

"This is not the same Mariano from before the accident," his mother said. "He's



Mariano Hernandez, now 13, suffered severe brain injuries, and part of his skull had to be removed after the accident.

a different kid."

Now 13 and in eighth grade, Mariano is in special education classes, learning at a third-grade level, Passen said.

Before the accident happened, Mariano was "a normal, active boy," his mother said, who enjoyed playing soccer and baseball with his friends.

"Now, it's just different," she said solemnly.

The day of the accident, his father said he thought he'd find his son had suffered an injury on the playground, maybe a bump or a scrape.

But when he arrived at the hospital, "I realized how serious it was."

Mariano suffered severe

brain injuries, and part of his skull had to be removed to reduce swelling. He spent almost three months in two hospitals before being able to come home to his parents, little brother and sister.

Passen said the brain damage not only affected Mariano's ability to learn, but it also caused physical disabilities.

"He still talks about what he wants to be, and we don't try to discourage that," his father said. "We don't do anything to knock down his morale. We want to let him keep thinking he's going to make it."

Attorneys for the school did not return calls Monday.