

Parents say school poses health threat

\$32 million suit says complaints were ignored

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Yolanda Eddins was concerned when her son Robert started coming home from his Warrenville school with yellow eyes, an itch from an unseen rash, and feelings of fatigue.

"I didn't know what to do," she said. "He had never really been sick before."

Eddins believes she now knows what happened to her son and what the culprit is—Johnson Elementary School.

Eddins is one of more than 30 parents of about 50 students and former students who filed a \$32 million lawsuit claiming that the west suburban school

is poisoning their kids.

"You send your kids to school thinking they will be in a safe environment, but they are not safe at that school," the Warrenville resident said.

School District 200 is accused of ignoring teachers' and parents' complaints about health problems that could be potentially harmful to the 680 students at the school. School officials, however, say the 10-year-old facility is safe.

The lawsuit alleges high mold counts—sometimes more than double the moderate risk level—in the school, pipes bursting in classrooms, moldy carpets and the appearance of worms crawling up through the floors all contributed to the environmental problems.

On Tuesday, a DuPage County judge postponed taking action on the case after District 200 officials said they were not properly served with the lawsuit.

The two sides are scheduled to meet again next Tuesday to hear an emergency motion by the parents' attorney to postpone opening the school.

School district spokeswoman Denie Young said the district spent \$600,000 during the last 18 months to address concerns raised by an environmental committee that included



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Johnson Elementary School students and mothers—Crystal Cowdrey (clockwise from lower left), Cherise Cowdrey, Nicole Saba, Rachel Limbrick and Patricia Huber—examine photographs of conditions at the Warrenville school Tuesday outside the DuPage County Courthouse.

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teachers, parents, administrators and an engineer with the county Health Department.

"We have taken many steps to improve the situation, and as a result of that work, the environment is much improved and offers a safe place for our students and staff," Young said.

The work included replacing carpeting with tile, adjusting ventilation units, reducing the number of chemicals used for cleaning, adding pipe insulation and improving drainage around the school's perimeter.

District officials also are willing to put students who fear the building is

making them sick in a different school. But that is not good enough for parents worried that previous exposure could lead to health problems down the road.

"I'm concerned about the future of my child," said Debbi Hejka, whose 7-year-old son used to attend the school. "Where do I go then?"