

# DAILY HERALD

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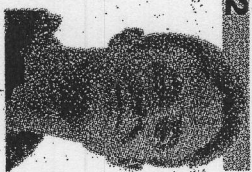
Wednesday, August 11, 1999

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# Dist. 200 says students can transfer out of 'sick' school

By ROBERT MCCOPPIN  
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Parents who are worried about their children getting sick at a Warrenville school may transfer them to another school, officials said Tuesday.

The offer was extended to a handful of parents who filed a lawsuit claiming that Johnson Elementary School is a "sick building."

Any other parents who are concerned can make the request of Wheaton Warrenville District 200, said Director of Communications Denie Young.

About 650 children have been enrolled for the fall and officials believe most parents are satisfied that health problems have been addressed.

The district can accommodate some transfers, but not hundreds, said Young.

"The important message we'd like to get out is we believe Johnson to be a safe school," Young said.

Parents began raising questions about health problems with the school in 1997, after a child almost died from an asthma attack.

Last August, parents filed suit in federal court, claiming their children contracted sinus or bronchial problems from the school building. The suit was refiled this summer in DuPage County Circuit Court, and seeks \$32 million in damages on behalf of 42 families.

Many of the children involved no longer attend the school, but the families are seeking payment for missed work, tutoring, and ongoing medical treatment. They also want to establish a medical fund for potential future medical problems.

Some of the parents welcomed the chance to transfer or get home tutoring, while others scoffed, saying that would not prevent the school from making others sick.

"I don't care about accommodations," said Yolanda Eddins of Wheaton. "It really needs to be torn down, or children are going to have serious problems."

Eddins' son is 15, so he hasn't attended the school since 1996, but his mother said he used to suffer headaches, stomach aches and sleepiness there, and still has a skin condition.

Sharon Pearson, the Warrenville mother of a 13-year-old former Johnson student who reported constant sinus problems, said the same problems exist at his current school, Hubble Middle School in Wheaton, though no similarly broad claims have been made there.

A court hearing is scheduled for Aug. 17 to consider a request by the parents' attorney, Thomas Zimmerman, for an emergency order to close the school.

Since the controversy arose, the district appointed a committee of parents, teachers, administrators and



Parents, from left, Sharon Pearson, Naomi Brewer, and Yolanda Eddins voice concerns Tuesday that Johnson School in Warrenville made their children sick.

Daily Herald Photo/Tanit Jarusan

## SICK: District made \$600,000 in repairs

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outside experts to study and address the health concerns.

The district has made \$600,000 in repairs to the school, including replacing carpeting and tiles, and improving ventilation and drainage. School officials say tests show mold levels there are not high enough to affect

children.

Unless Judge Hollis Webster closes the school, it is scheduled to open on schedule: Aug. 23 for teachers, Aug. 24 for students.

The district will hold a public meeting to answer questions about the school's safety, and to give a tour of the building, at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 18 at the school, 700 Continental Drive.

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