

Johnson Elementary injunction postponed

BY BRETT KOPPEN

A DuPage County judge Tuesday postponed a ruling for a permanent injunction that would close Johnson Elementary School for the start of classes.

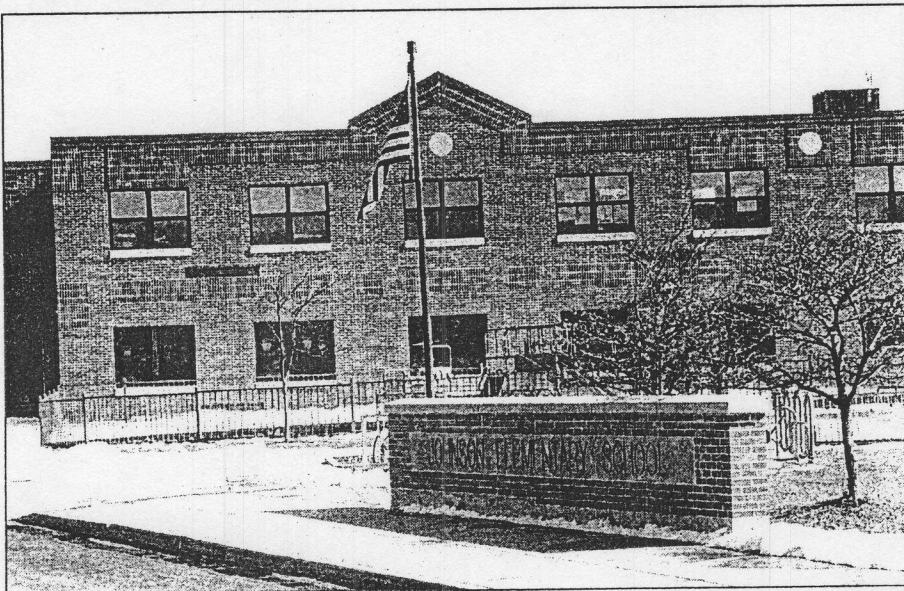
Attorneys acting on behalf of a group of parents had filed an emergency motion to close the school. Judge Robert Lukas postponed the case because he was not as familiar with it as Judge Hollis Webster, who is on vacation this week. The hearing was pushed back to 9 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 17, at the DuPage County Civil Courthouse, 505 N. County Farm Road, in Wheaton.

"We'd like to have a resolution," said Plaintiff's Attorney Thomas Zimmerman. "We're ready to go."

A lawsuit in 1997 was brought about by a group of parents against District 200, which claims that Johnson Elementary was responsible for illnesses suffered by several students. Tuesday's hearing was scheduled to prevent Johnson from opening for regular classes Aug. 24. Attorneys for the parents claim the school is still unsafe.

Zimmerman claims that two studies, one conducted by a janitor at the school, another by a company contracted by the district, supports the parents' allegations. He said one report cites leaky pipes and ceilings, along with high mold spore counts in the school.

"These are the types of problems that cause the illnesses of which the children are complaining," he said. "If the district wants to try to show the school is clean, I'm certain the judge will provide them with an opportunity



PRESS-REPUBLICAN FILE PHOTO

A group of parents is going through legal channels to get Johnson Elementary School shut down permanently.

at that time [next Tuesday]."

District 200 Communications Director Denie Young said the district has offered compensation for the individuals named in the lawsuit. The district is offering to provide transportation for students if they wish to attend a different school this year.

Zimmerman said the offer by the district is unacceptable.

"If that's the case, it's a half-hearted offer," he said. "What happens to those kids that were pulled out a long time ago? [The offer] is for the parents whose kids are starting in the fall, and that's it."

District 200 officials insist that Johnson is safe, and are giving parents a chance to express their concerns in an

open forum. A meeting is scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Aug. 18, at Johnson, and Young said the school encourages anyone with questions to attend.

"We have sent a letter to all the Johnson parents, assuring them that we believe Johnson is a safe school," Young said. "At that [meeting], we will address all the activities that have taken place in the last 18 months to improve air quality at the school."

Young also disputes the reports that say the school is still unsafe.

"There is no industry standard for what is safe and what isn't," she said. "There isn't a cut-off that says, 'OK, your school is safe' or, 'your school isn't safe.'"