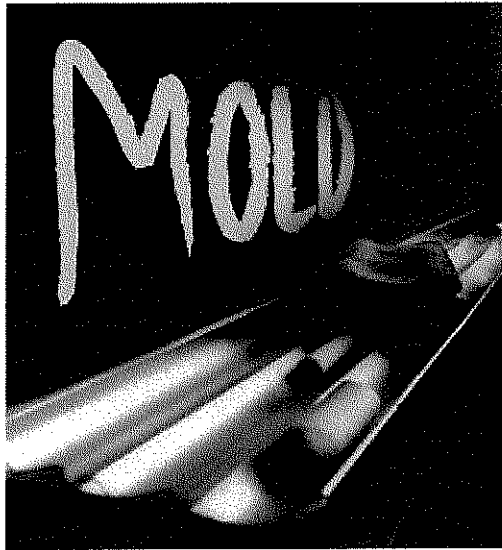


# MOLD LAWSUITS BEING FILED



*By Rob Reddy*

taken from  
**North Port Sun**

Friday, February 27, 2004

# Mold lawsuits being filed

## Lemon Bay High School, Glenallen Elementary are targeted

ENGLEWOOD — A series of lawsuits are expected to be filed Monday on behalf of the students affected by a perceived mold problem at Lemon Bay High School in Englewood and Glenallen Elementary School in North Port.

More than a half-dozen families have been impacted at both schools, according to a spokesperson with the law firm filing the suits. Their frustration with an apparent lack of dealing with the problem has forced the families to act.

"I never imagined that the school would have made my children sick," said Heather Duchesney, whose daughter and son both attended Glenallen before she removed them in December. "I want them to get the problem solved because if they don't, more and more children are going to get sick."

The Babbitt-Johnson Law Firm is expected to file a series of suits Monday.

Details of the suits are not being publicized until that time, said firm spokeswoman Gina Giovanni. Additional schools in Sarasota and Manatee counties are also being targeted by the suits.

"We don't want the school officials to harass these people," Giovanni said. "They have been through enough."

Diana Farnam, whose daughter Keisha has been ill since starting at LBHS four years ago, has not been in school since the start of the year after being diagnosed with reactive airway disease.

"She is still very sick," Farnam said of Keisha's current health. "I want the school district to acknowledge my daughter is sick because of the mold."

Farnam is one of several parents of LBHS students who are participating in the law suit.

"This has to stop," she said. "These students deserve a chance at an education without getting sick."

The symptoms of students at both schools is eerily similar.

Bloody noses, intense headaches, wet coughs, burning eyes, constant sneezing and dry throats are just some of the ailments the students have faced.

"It is terrible seeing your child sick and there is only one reason: the school," Farnam said.

Charlotte County School Superintendent Dave Gaylor said he

was disappointed by the filing of the suit.

"This is a regrettable situation," Gaylor said. "We've done the best we could possibly do as a school district to alleviate those concerns."

Some of the actions include an inspection of the school for mold by staff and Florida Department of Education officials with no mold found and a cleaning of the air system, he said.

Similar actions have been taken by the Sarasota County School District at Glenallen, said Scott Lempe, executive director for human resources at the district.

"We have addressed every concern which has been raised," Lempe said. "If these issues are being raised again, we are going to go back down there and test again."

He regrets the process of a lawsuit is about to begin.

"We will address the details as they come," Lempe said.

At Glenallen, more than a dozen public complaints have been filed with the Sarasota County School Board by teachers and parents of children who have been getting sick since 1999.

The district actually moved a teacher who was experiencing problems related to mold to a different classroom, but air quality tests have all proved negative, Lempe said.

The complaints are not limited to the portables at Glenallen, but include the main brick building as well. Complaints range from musty smells to moldy carpets, standing water underneath portables during rainy season, condensation on the inside of school windows and high levels of carbon dioxide.

Glenallen's entire air conditioning system is currently being revamped, which is expected to be completed in 2005, but district officials say the work is not related to the mold situation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, mold can cause children and adults with asthma to have severe reactions. Mold can grow behind wallpaper and inside insulation. It can saturate wood paneling and carpets and live inside air conditioning ducts.

The Environmental Protection Agency says mold can cause "headaches, breathing difficulties, skin irritation, allergic reactions and aggravation of asthma symptoms."

The EPA recommends schools with a history of problems with mold should hold a "special meeting" to discuss the problems and proposed remedies.

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