

By Collin Nash

STAFF WRITER

Attorneys for a fifth-grade student who alleges a veteran teacher touched her on the thighs during a math class have notified officials they intend to file a \$36-million lawsuit against the Connetquot Central School District and the teacher, who was the subject of a 1988 grand jury proceeding involving similar allegations.

Clifford A. Reitz, 48, a teacher at Edward J. Bosti Elementary School in Bohemia, was charged last week with one count of first-degree attempted sex abuse and one count of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child.

Superintendent John Maloney could not be reached for comment on the suit.

Reitz, of 375 Pond Rd., Bohemia, was suspended with pay shortly after the June incident. He was released Sept. 13 on \$2,500 bail after arraignment in First District Court, Central Islip, where he pleaded not guilty. A spokesman for the Suffolk District Attorney's Office said Reitz could face 1½ to 4 years in prison if convicted.

Reitz' attorney, Paul Gianelli, has said his client is innocent of the allegations, which he called an attempt to get money from Reitz and the district.

In 1988, a grand jury declined to indict Reitz on sex abuse charges stemming from two alleged incidents, one in 1987 and another in 1988, involving female students at Bosti. Details of the grand jury proceeding are sealed, said Drew Biondo, spokesman for the district attorney's office.

A former Bosti student now living in Pennsylvania said in a recent phone interview that she gave a prosecutor handling the 1988 case a deposition alleging that Reitz sexually molested her and four other students between 1973 and 1974.

In the most recent case, a 12-year-old girl allegedly abused June 21 "sustained severe personal injuries including pain and emotional distress," her attorneys, Gary Goldinger, Harry Weinberg and Eric Naiburg claimed in the notice of suit, filed June 27.

"Our investigation shows that this teacher has engaged in similar acts of misconduct," Goldinger said last week in a telephone interview. "The suit is an attempt to put an end to the continuous tragic events."

According to Goldinger, the 12-year-old said she and another student went to him for help in math. She sat next to Reitz at his desk and the other student sat on the other side of him, the girl said.

While he was discussing the math problem with her, the girl said, Reitz touched her thigh and tried to force her legs apart. The student sitting on the other side of Reitz saw him touch the girl, Goldinger said.

Now 31 years old, the former student who said she was molested in 1973-74 said Reitz fondled her breasts and thighs on several occasions while she was a student in his fifth- and sixth-grade classes. Several of the incidents occurred during cooking classes and recess, while Reitz played cards with other students, the woman said.

The former Oakdale resident, who moved to Pennsylvania two years ago, said she and other students whom Reitz abused talked about reporting the incidents but were afraid no one would believe them.

She finally told her parents while in her late teens, after watching a television movie called "Something Wrong With Amelia," the woman said. She gave a deposition to the district attorney during the 1988 grand jury proceedings, after those allegations were aired on television, she said.

"I was so angry he was still doing this I had to sit down and write Newsday a letter," the woman said, referring to the latest charges against Reitz.

Bosti's principal, Richard Bernato, said that in the five years he's been principal, he never heard allegations against Reitz until after the latest charges. "The whole thing is extremely sad on all sides. . . . I counted on him as a professional. I counted on him as a teacher. He's a good teacher."

Last week, at the first meeting this year of Bosti's Parent-Teacher Association, parents said that school officials have virtually assured them that if Reitz is cleared, he will be

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