

Accused Naperville teacher to resign

By Grace Aduroja

Tribune staff reporter

A Naperville District 203 teacher accused of sexually abusing students at a Chicago parochial school decades ago agreed to resign at the end of the year but will continue working at the administrative offices until then, school officials said Tuesday.

School board members voted unanimously at a Monday meeting that Phil Cappelleri, who has taught in the district for 12 years, will no longer coordinate the physical education program at Jefferson Junior High School or work in any Naperville school. Instead, he will continue to receive his annual salary of about \$87,000 by assisting on several projects at the district level.

Earlier this year, three of Cappelleri's former students alleged that they were sexually abused when he was a teacher at De La Salle Institute in the 1980s. Two civil suits were filed in January against Cappelleri and the Christian Brothers of Illinois, the Catholic order that runs the all-boys school.

"If this guy is allowed to resign, then potentially he can go to another school district and get a job teaching kids," said Joseph Klest, the attorney for one of the men who filed a civil suit. "They have let him off easy."

Nearly a year before the lawsuits were filed, Jim Hanks, a Wheaton man and former De La Salle student, sent a letter to District 203 administrators alleging that Cappelleri displayed "inappropriate behavior" on a school sports trip in 1980.

School officials contacted Hanks but were unable to find evidence of abuse involving Naperville students.

Cappelleri's attorney, Paul Klencck, said his client denies that any abuse took place.

Cappelleri was placed on administrative leave in January after the suits were filed in Cook County Circuit Court and continued to receive his full salary from District 203.

Board members conducted an independent investigation after the suit was filed and found no evidence of misconduct by Cappelleri while he was employed in Naperville, according to a District 203 statement.

Cappelleri, who lives in Lisle, will resign because the disruptive civil action could take years to resolve, according to the district statement.