

Former Delsea Regional High student alleges sexual abuse by math teacher in the 1980s

Former student David Reeves said he was sexually abused by a former teacher in the 1980s and has sued the school district for failing to protect him.



Gloucester County Superior Court in Woodbury.

Jim Walsh

by Melanie Burney

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A former Delsea Regional High School student has accused a math teacher of sexually abusing him years ago and is suing the South Jersey school system for failing to protect him.

A lawsuit filed in Superior Court in [Gloucester County](#) on Friday alleges the former student was subjected to predatory conduct and sexual abuse by former teacher Cheryl Cousin in the 1980s.

According to court documents, the alleged abuse occurred when the student, David Reeves, was a junior and senior and not yet 18. Cousin was a math teacher in the district, but he was not her student, the lawsuit said.

Attorney [Jeffrey P. Fritz](#) said Cousin groomed Reeves for abuse using her position of power and trust, and district employees who knew or should have known about the abuse failed to stop it.

“Schools have both a legal and moral obligation to protect children entrusted to their care,” Fritz said in a statement. “When school officials become aware of suspected abuse, the law requires immediate reporting to authorities and decisive action which didn’t occur here.”

Cousin, reached for comment Monday, said she was stunned by the allegations. She has retired from the district and is not defendant in the lawsuit, though she is named in the complaint. “I think I’m in shock right now. I guess I better call a lawyer,” she said, declining further comment.

Delsea Regional Superintendent Fran Ciolciola did not respond to email and voicemail messages. The school board’s solicitor, Frank P. Cavallo Jr., said the district had not received a copy of the lawsuit Monday and declined to comment.

Reeves, 55, said he decided to use his name in the case to encourage other child sex abuse victims, especially male victims, to come forward. (The Inquirer does not identify victims in sexual assault cases without their consent).

The alleged sexual assault occurred between the 1987-88 and 1988-89 school years, Fritz said.

There were at least 20 alleged assaults at various locations, the lawsuit alleges.



Reeves, who is now a health and physical education teacher in Camden public school schools, said in an interview he was afraid to come forward until now.

“I have nothing to be embarrassed about,” Reeves said. “I am a victim who is standing up and putting my name on it.”

Married and the father of two, Reeves said the alleged abuse began his junior year when a fellow basketball team member told him that Cousin

liked him and gave him her number. Cousin was the girls’ cheerleading coach, he said.

Reeves said he visited Cousin’s apartment and the two began a sexual relationship that continued into his senior year. Cousin purchased two pairs of Air Jordan sneakers for him and let him drive her Camaro, he said.

Reeves said the relationship was well-known in the school among students and teachers. Girls refused to date him because they believed he was involved with Cousin, he said.

According to the lawsuit, the then-school Principal Frank Borelli called Reeves to the office to question him about their suspicions. Reeves said he didn’t want to cause problems for Cousin so he denied that he was involved with her.

“I was a child. I was scared to death,” he said.

Borelli later became the district’s longtime superintendent and currently serves on the school board. He is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit, but the school board is listed as a defendant. Borelli did not respond to a message seeking comment.

The lawsuit also alleges that the district failed to make mandatory reports of suspected abuse to the state’s child welfare agency, according to the complaint.

It was filed under the 2019 [New Jersey Child Victims Act](#), which extended the statute of limitations to allow child sex abuse victims to sue their abusers and the institutions that protected them until they turn 55. Reeves turned 55 Saturday.

The law [made it easier for child sexual abuse victims to seek justice in civil court](#). Thousands of cases have since been filed, many of them involving public and private schools and the Roman Catholic Church in New Jersey.

Experts say victims of sexual abuse often struggle to disclose the trauma they experienced until an older age, often between 40 and 55.

Reeves said his wife of 16 years, Stacy, encouraged him to come forward with his allegations. He said he has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and has battled drug and alcohol addiction.

He wants to advocate for other victims, especially boys. [It is estimated that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys](#) experience some form of sexual abuse before age 18, according to [Child USA](#), a Philadelphia-based children's rights advocacy group.

"It does not matter if I am male. I was a kid," Reeves said. "It has affected me a long time."

"It couldn't have been any more well-known," Reeves said.



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I write about education in New Jersey, focusing on issues and trends that shape learning for the state's K-12 students in public and charter schools.