



Office of the Superintendent
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Christopher D. Cerf
State District Superintendent

Dear NPS Family Member,

As Superintendent of the Newark Public Schools the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff is my highest priority. This is why just over a week ago, when made aware of elevated lead samples taken at 30 of our school buildings, I made the decision to bring water into those schools and to share the results of those tests broadly with the public.

It is clear from our review of past data and historical actions that this problem is one that has been with us for some time. While it is also clear that prior administrations have worked to prevent and remediate this issue, we have decided to go above and beyond what has been done in the past to make sure that we solve this problem once and for all. Over the past week, my staff has been working with great urgency to do just that, while making sure that you have the resources and support you need to continue to feel safe in our schools. We know that there is a great deal of anxiety and misinformation in our community about this issue. I am writing today to assure you that we are doing everything we can to be responsive to your concerns. Here are some updates about that work:

- 1. Sites are Available for Optional Health Screenings:** The Newark Department of Health will provide free blood screenings for children. Please know that these screenings are optional, and being offered as a precaution for families who have expressed interest. If you have a primary care physician, we recommend that you consult with them as a first step. These sites will be open over Spring Break to families. Our website will be updated with specific site and time information by the end of the day.
- 2. A Comprehensive Water Testing Plan is Complete:** a water-testing plan is in place that will include every faucet and fountain in every active building in the district.
 - These tests will allow us to establish a new baseline for water quality at NPS.
 - The DEP anticipates beginning testing on Saturday, March 19, to begin receiving results as soon as a week after the start of testing, and on a rolling basis thereafter.
 - We will determine next steps to remediate any elevated levels detected on a case-by-case basis.
- 3. A Water Distribution Plan is in Place:** We are coordinating with outside agencies, including the Mayor's Office and the County to assure there is ample alternate water supply for students, faculty and staff at the 30 identified school buildings.
 - We also have heard your feedback about boxed water. This was an emergency solution, and we hope to move every identified building to bottled waters and 5-gallon jugs over the break.
- 4. Information is Available about Past Water Test Results:** Last week, we shared the data we had immediate access to with the public that showed there were elevated lead levels in 30 school buildings.

- We have also made past data available from our current lab which shows that out of about 2,067 water quality samples collected between 2012 and 2015, approximately 12% (258 samples) reflected lead levels above the federal action level of 15 ppb.
- This data is similar to those shared in the current year, where about 10% (or 66 out of 657) of samples collected were above 15 ppb.

5. **We are Reviewing Historical Protocols and Actions:** Dating back at least to the early 2000's the Newark Public Schools began a water system flushing program of all water sources used for drinking and food preparation, and made a concerted effort to replace thousands of faucets and fountains. Since that time, other protocols have been in place, these include:
- Placing lead reduction filters on all water fountains and kitchen sinks across the district
 - Regularly replacing lead reduction filters, which is to be monitored by the head custodian in each building
 - Providing on-going guidance to schools on flushing protocols
 - Conducting annual tests of lead level in water
 - Taking remedial actions when elevated samples are detected (i.e. replacing fixtures, filters, or pipes as needed).
 - A review of our documentation confirms that thousands of mitigation actions, including filter replacement; faucet and sink repairs, were completed pursuant to these directives. We continue to investigate what actions were taken to remediate past test results, and will share further information about those actions as we have them.

Our actions over the past week have begun a process for correcting these historical issues, and our hope is that by raising these concerns with the public and taking a more thorough approach, we will create a long-standing policy that our families and staff can have confidence in. Please see the following resources for more information:

- For answers to Frequently Asked Questions, please visit: <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/blog/mdocs-posts/nps-water-quality-faq/>
- For data for your school from this year and prior years, please visit: <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/departments/facilities/water-quality/>

We are very grateful for your patience and hard work during this challenging time. We will continue to communicate with you throughout this process, and will provide regular updates on water testing and specific measures the district is taking to remedy the situation.

Sincerely,

Christopher D. Cerf
Superintendent