

## **Report on Water Testing in Milwaukee Public Schools**

The following update is intended to provide the community with a clear understanding of Milwaukee Public Schools' efforts in regards to water testing along with the timeline and sequence of events.

Although state and federal regulations do not require school districts to test water, MPS took a proactive approach to assure a safe learning environment for students and staff. To reduce disruption to school communities, water sampling was conducted during the summer break. The primary focus of the water sampling was on fixtures meant for consumption.

The results of the testing found the following:

- More than 12,000 samples were taken from district buildings.
- Water coming from virtually all MPS drinking fountains meets Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) standards.
- Ninety-four percent of all drinking fountains tested at levels below the EPA standard of 15ppb (parts per billion).
- There are more than 3,000 water fountains in MPS; 183 had levels above EPA standards.
- Any fixture that tested above EPA standards was immediately turned off. These units were scheduled for replacement with service to resume after the replacement fixture is tested. Many of these fixtures have already been replaced.

There are no lead service lines leading from the City of Milwaukee's water service into MPS school buildings. Lead service lines are a main source of lead in water.

In March 2016, the Department of Facilities and Maintenance (FMS) suggested a thorough and proactive process to reassure families that water in MPS buildings was safe for consumption. After seeing national news on school district water quality, FMS staff wanted to validate their assumption that MPS had quality water sources based on EPA regulations. These first tests serve as a baseline for determining how to further decrease potential areas of exposure.

In April 2016, the Director of Facilities and Maintenance and Supervisor of Hazardous Material worked with the Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) to develop and finalize a water sampling plan. This plan utilized all EPA guidelines/best practices and staff identified two independent labs to perform water testing. The final analysis and validation of the sampling plan and testing protocol was provided by the City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD).

In an effort to maintain the integrity of the results, only the hazardous material/environmental staff and department lead reviewed and shared results and methodology with the MHD. After all fixtures were tested and the entire process was deemed to be in a state of completion by internal staff and MHD, all results were released to the public. Providing information prior to the completion of this work could invalidate

the data and increase integrity concerns for MHD.

In June 2016, the Office of School Administration provided school leaders with letters (attached) and talking points to notify parents and students of the upcoming testing and that results would be made available in the fall after returning to school.

Also in June 2016, the Communications and Marketing staff notified Fox6 News of the following: *“As a precaution, MPS will test the water quality in all buildings this summer. We developed this protocol with the input of the City of Milwaukee Health Department. We do not have any lead laterals and do not expect to find any issues; this is being done simply to reassure our families and our communities. The testing began earlier this week. Results will be shared with school communities when classes begin in August and September.”*

From June 2016 - September 2016, the MPS FMS Department staff drew water samples from school buildings and sent the collected samples into the two independent labs identified for testing. During this time, FMS staff reviewed the test results from the labs and determined that when any result was greater than 15 parts per billion (ppb), FMS staff completely shut off the source of water, which is in line with EPA recommendations. After shutting off the source of water to that location, plumbing staff worked to identify the pipeline component or area of the fixture causing the increased level of testing/exposure. After replacing the component, staff took an additional sample and sent to the labs for testing. If the test had elevated levels, FMS staff worked to determine additional plumbing components that were causing issues. No fixture was placed back in service until the tests results were under the EPA standards.

In the Fall 2016, MPS provided several updates to the community as follows:

- August: An update for the Mayor the City of Milwaukee as he wanted to relay information to the Water Commons group.
- September: A parent and student update on our testing effort for those returning MPS schools.
- August – October: Answering multiple requests from most of Milwaukee’s major news outlets in regards to the project’s progress and approximate timetable to release results.
- October: The attendance of the MPS Chief Operations Officer to City of Milwaukee’s Water Quality Task Force hearing to discuss results and efforts to-date along with the overall scope of the project. The district was commended by the Task Force for its proactive efforts as the only school district and entity in the state of Wisconsin performing this level of due diligence on water quality.

From October - December 2016, the Milwaukee Health Department worked with FMS staff to provide the final validation and analysis of all test results with a clear focus on quality of data, fidelity of methodology, and adherence to the initial process as outlined in the scope of the project.

In early December, the MHD notified the district that the validation was complete and

MPS could finalize the process for releasing all test results. MPS provided parents and students with another update and an interactive website to view all test results. MHD praised MPS efforts: “. . . we applaud MPS in taking a leadership role by conducting voluntary testing and providing the results to our community. The City of Milwaukee Health Department worked collaboratively with MPS to develop a testing protocol that can be used as a model by other schools and school districts everywhere.”

Since the test results have been made public, MPS has received approximately 50 phone calls in December and the families were pleased with district efforts.

A local news outlet aired a story that contained several incorrect facts. To address this, the district once again communicated the correct information to families and filed a formal complaint with the news outlet. The district switchboard received 17 phone calls after the story aired. Families were satisfied after receiving the correct information from the district.

We are proud of the work performed by the FMS staff. While this project was not mandated, it demonstrates the proactive commitment by our district to ensure the safety of our students and families. As you are aware, we have created a website – [mpsmke.com/testresults](https://mpsmke.com/testresults) to share the results with the community.

We are in the process of developing further testing protocols as we continue the periodic testing of all MPS fixtures.