Metro Schools Leads State In Testing Drinking Water for Lead

Metro Schools’ water meets all federal and state lead drinking water standards

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (June 23, 2017) – While not required by the city or state, Metro Schools voluntarily initiated a water safety testing program to affirm the safety of the drinking water in schools. MNPS is the only district in Tennessee to test drinking water for lead. The two-phase testing program is a proactive measure that has been implemented in partnership with Metro Public Health, Metro Water Services, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation and an outside vendor specializing in water testing.

“The drinking water in the district’s oldest buildings meet all federal and state lead drinking water standards,” explained Dennis Neal, Executive Director of Facilities and Grounds Maintenance for Metro Schools.

The goal of the first phase of the program was to test the water in the district’s oldest schools, those built in or before 1955. Why? Lead found in tap water is usually from the corrosion of older fixtures or from older water pipes. Piping, faucets and fixtures made prior to 1955 contain higher lead levels, which contribute to the level of lead in drinking water. In addition, lead levels in water tend to increase when buildings are not in use.

The rigorous testing was guided by Metro Health and Metro Water Services. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation reviewed the results. Because no lead level standards exist for K-12 school districts in Tennessee, the district used the drinking water standard used by Metro Water Services to test the city’s public water supply, which is 15 parts per billion, a minute amount equivalent to one second out of 32 years.

“Just to be as thorough as possible, we tested every drinking fountain and every water source where someone could conceivably take a drink, including faucets attached to sinks in classrooms, locker rooms, bathrooms, art rooms and so on,” explained Neal.

In summer 2016, the district gathered 2,869 samples at 49 schools, averaging 58 samples per school site. Of the more than 2,800 samples, 81 registered higher than the testing standard. “Lead levels are higher in buildings that are unoccupied. So we were not surprised to find that when we retested the 81 samples in early fall, only 28 remained above the standard,” Neal added.

The water was closed off to the 28 locations, and they can no longer be used. Metro Nashville Water Services and the Metro Nashville Health Department sampled and confirmed Metro Schools’ water meets all federal and state lead drinking water standards.

Now in phase 2, the goal is to test buildings constructed between 1956 and 1988. The findings will be available by summer 2018.

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METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Metro Nashville Public Schools is one of the nation’s top 50 largest school districts, preparing 88,000 students to excel in higher education, work and life. With the goal of being the first choice for Nashville’s families, Metro Schools is committed to providing a high quality education to every student. The district is earning a national reputation for urban school reform, its commitment to social and emotional learning and rising academic achievement. The governing body for Metro Schools is the Metropolitan Nashville Board of Public Education, a nine-member elected body. For more information, visit MNPS.org.