

Scott Saywell
School District 68 Superintendent/CEO
Charlene McKay
School District 68 Board Chair
395 Wakesiah Avenue
Nanaimo, BC V9R 3K6

September 30, 2019

Dear Charlene and Scott,

We are writing to express our strong concern and ask for your support regarding the issue of lead concentration in drinking water at our school, Ecole Hammond Bay.

In March 2019, Health Canada lowered a Maximum Acceptable Concentration of total lead in drinking water from 0.01 to 0.005 mg/L¹. Health Canada stated “... *this value is protective of the health of Canadians, including the most vulnerable members of society, such as infants and children... Health Canada revised the previous guideline value ... because new scientific studies have shown that health effects can occur from exposure to lead at much lower levels than previously thought*”. Inorganic lead is classified as “*probably carcinogenic to humans*” by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. The World Health Organization identified lead as 1 of 10 chemicals of major public health concern, stating that “*young children are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning because they absorb 4–5 times as much ingested lead as adults from a given source. Once lead enters the body, it is distributed to organs such as the brain, kidneys, liver and bones. The body stores lead in the teeth and bones where it accumulates over time. There is no known safe blood lead concentration, but it is known that, as lead exposure increases, the range and severity of symptoms and effects also increases. Even blood lead concentrations ... once thought to be a “safe level”, may be associated with decreased intelligence in children, behavioural difficulties, and learning problems*”².

The 2017 water testing at Ecole Hammond Bay³ resulted in 7 out of 22 sampling points showing lead concentration above then-recommended acceptable limit of 0.01 mg/L; all sampling points tested below then-recommended acceptable limit after a 30 second flush. However, given the new Health Canada recommendation, 12 (60% of all tested) water sources, including 9 fountains in sinks and 1 drinking fountain in the gym foyer, are now above the acceptable limit before the flush. Other water sources, although technically *below* the limit, cannot be considered *safe* for our children.

We trust that the recommended 2-minute flushes are performed by the staff daily and that children have been advised to not drink from taps and water fountains. However, we know that young children are unlikely to always follow the advice “run water until cold”, often forget, and sometimes do things “just this one time”. Considering all of the above, we ask for the following:

1. Dismantling all water fountains at the school.
2. Continuing with daily flushes.
3. Installing at least 4 additional water filling stations, including at least one in or near the gym.

We asked our PAC to fund the costs of installing additional water filling stations, but received the following response:

“This is a district facilities issue and until the school in conjunction with the facilities puts a plan for water filtration systems on the facilities plan for Ecole Hammond Bay elementary we can not allocate money for this expenditure. It is not within PAC mandate to fundraise for something that is not part of the current facilities plan as determine by the school district. We are unable to begin fundraising or to identify this expenditure as part of our capital budget. At this point it is out of PACs realm and needs to be dealt with at the district level.”

We ask School District 68 to put drinking water treatment at Ecole Hammond Bay (and other schools, as needed) on the facilities plan and to allocate funding to this issue as soon as possible, ensuring our schools are a safe place for all students.

Sincerely,

Anya & Jason Dunham, parents of a Grade 3 student and a student-to-be

and:

Julie Bevan & Chad Oakenfold, parents of a Grade 3 student and a Kindergarten student

Bronwyn Sawyer & Neil Goeller, parents of a Grade 3 student and a Kindergarten student

Sarah Dudas & James Mortimor, parents of Grade 3 student Grade 1 students

Brian & Stephanie Murphy, parents of students in Grade 3 and Kindergarten

Vanessa Hodes and Rob Flemming, parents of Grade 4 and 6 students

Kinga & Markus Muntener, parents of a Grade 3 student and a Kindergarten student

¹ Health Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/reports-publications/water-quality/water-talk-minimizing-exposure-lead-drinking-water-distribution-systems.html#s3>

² World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/lead-poisoning-and-health>

³ SD68: <https://www.sd68.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016-17/SD68-Drinking-Water-Lead-Inventory-Tetra-Tech-Report-April-2017-Part-1.pdf>