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JAMAICA PLAIN

## Paint removal at JP school may temporarily relocate classes

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 19, 2011 02:35 PM

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By **Matt Rocheleau**, Town Correspondent

Work to remove “trace amounts” of a toxic chemical in the old, flaking paint of a Jamaica Plain elementary school building may delay the opening of the facility past start of the academic year that begins in three weeks, school officials said in a letter to families Friday.

Officials plan to remove the paint inside the James W. Hennigan Elementary School and then repaint the facility. The building, which also houses the West Zone Early Learning Center, has “significant flaking of paint throughout,” officials said, and when tested this summer as part of a summer maintenance and repairs program, the paint was found to have “trace amounts of PCB levels.”

“Even though the amount of PCBs in the paint is nominal and is not even significant enough to meet federal reporting thresholds, we would like to take this opportunity to safely remove flaking paint and repaint in a way that does not disrupt students and staff throughout the year,” Superintendent Carol R. Johnson said in Friday’s letter.

If the K-5 school on Heath Street is not ready to open when the year starts Sept. 8, officials plan to hold classes temporarily at the Louis Agassiz Elementary School on Child Street, around one-and-a-half miles away from Hennigan elementary.

Exposure to PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, has been shown “to cause cancer, as well as a variety of other adverse health effects on the immune system, reproductive system, nervous system, and endocrine system,” according to [the federal environmental protection agency](#), which banned the chemical in 1979.

In schools built between 1950 and 1978, some construction materials contained PCB, city school officials explained.

The Agassiz was closed this summer – one of 18 Boston schools that were either closed or merged as part of an effort to close an expected \$63 million budget gap.

“The fact that the Agassiz is nearby and is available immediately means we have a good backup option,” Johnson wrote in the letter. “The Agassiz building has already been renovated in accordance with our environmental assessment policies and can easily house students, staff and programs at the beginning of the school year.”

City school officials said they expect to announce further details about a

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schedule for the project within the next week. If temporary relocation of classes is necessary, officials will hold a meeting for Hennigan and West Zone Early Learning Center parents.

“By taking steps now we can ensure that the nominal levels of PCBs we detected in ceiling paint can be removed safely,” the superintendent said. “We made this decision with careful guidance from nationally-recognized specialists and with the Boston Public Health Commission. They, as well as the State Department of Public Health told us that our environmental assessment and remediation plan goes above and beyond what other cities and school districts around the nation are doing, and far beyond what federal regulations require.

Beginning Monday, questions can be directed to the Boston Public Schools’ “back-to-school hotline” at 617-635-9046 or online at [www.bostonpublicschools.org](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org).

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Below is a copy of the [letter's full text](#) in English and then in Spanish:

Here is a letter from Superintendent Carol R. Johnson about the project, sent August 19:

Dear Hennigan Elementary School and West Zone Early Learning Center family,

I hope this letter finds you well and that you are having a relaxing and productive summer. We are writing today to let you know of some repairs being made to the Hennigan School facility that may take more time than anticipated to complete. These efforts may impact the start of school at this facility. We are preparing the Agassiz School at 20 Child St. in Jamaica Plain as a back-up option, if necessary, to allow time to make all repairs appropriately.

The repairs to the Hennigan facility are part of our ongoing summer maintenance program that includes our environmental improvement program for all of our schools. In school buildings built between 1950 and 1978, some construction materials contained PCB, a chemical that the Environmental Protection Agency determined was potentially harmful with long-term exposures. We know that there is significant flaking of paint throughout the Hennigan School building, which was constructed during this time period. We tested the paint and found trace amounts of PCB levels. Even though the amount of PCBs in the paint is nominal and is not even significant enough to meet federal reporting thresholds, we would like to take this opportunity to safely remove flaking paint and repaint in a way that does not disrupt students and staff throughout the year.

The fact that the Agassiz is nearby and is available immediately means we have a good backup option. The Agassiz building has already been renovated in accordance with our environmental assessment policies and can easily house students, staff and programs at the beginning of the school year. We and Hennigan principal Maria Cordon as well as West Zone ELC principal Kathleen Sullivan will be in touch with you shortly to let you know the status of our repair project and whether we will need to temporarily move to the Agassiz School building.

By taking steps now we can ensure that the nominal levels of PCBs we detected in ceiling paint can be removed safely. We made this decision with careful guidance from nationally-recognized specialists and with the Boston Public Health Commission. They, as well as the State Department of Public Health told us that our environmental assessment and remediation plan goes above and beyond what other cities and school districts around the nation are doing, and far beyond what federal regulations require.

If you have questions, please call our back-to-school hotline at 617-635-9046. We expect to know a schedule for this project within the next week and will

communicate it with you. If we do need to move students to the Agassiz School building as school begins, we will schedule a meeting for Hennigan and West Zone Early Learning Center parents so you can speak with us directly and get all your questions answered. Keeping you informed of our progress is our top priority.

Thank you for your understanding and your patience.

Sincerely,

Carol R. Johnson  
Superintendent

Information on PCBs for families from the Boston Public Health Commission (.pdf),  
Or you may call the Commission at (617) 534-5965.

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Estimadas familias de la Escuela Primaria Hennigan y del Jardín Infantil de la Zona Oeste:

Espero que al recibir la presente se encuentre bien y disfrutando de un verano relajante y productivo. Hoy le escribimos para informarle de algunas reparaciones que se están realizando en las instalaciones de la Escuela Hennigan que podrían demorar más de lo previsto. Dicha labor podría afectar el comienzo de las clases en ese edificio. Estamos preparando, por si fuera necesario, la Escuela Agassiz localizada en la Calle Child número 20 en Jamaica Plain como segunda opción para dar tiempo de hacer todas las reparaciones apropiadamente.

Los arreglos a las instalaciones de la escuela Hennigan son parte de nuestro programa de mantenimiento en curso de mejoramiento ambiental de todas nuestras escuelas. En los edificios que fueron construidos entre 1950 y 1978 se utilizaron materiales de construcción que contenían PCB, un químico que según la Agencia de Protección Ambiental presenta posibles daños por vecindad de larga duración. Sabemos que hay mucha pintura descascarada en todo el edificio de la Escuela Hennigan, el cual fue construido durante este período de tiempo. Hemos analizado la pintura y encontramos rastros de ciertos niveles de PCB. A pesar de que los niveles de PCB en la pintura son nominales y no lo suficientemente importante como para alcanzar el umbral de notificación federal, nos gustaría aprovechar esta oportunidad para eliminar toda la pintura descascarada y pintar todo el edificio sin afectar a los estudiantes y al personal durante el año.

El hecho de que la escuela Agassiz está cerca y disponible para uso inmediato significa que tenemos un buen plan de contingencia. El edificio de la escuela Agassiz ya fue renovado según las directrices de nuestra evaluación ambiental y el mismo fácilmente podrá alojar a los estudiantes, el personal y los programas durante el comienzo de este año escolar. Nosotros, juntamente con la directora de la escuela Hennigan, Maria Cordon y la directora del programa ELC de la Zona Oeste, Kathleen Sullivan estaremos prontamente en contacto con usted para informarle del estado de nuestro proyecto de reparación y si va a ser necesario trasladar a la Hennigan de manera temporera al edificio de la Escuela Agassiz.

El tomar estas medidas ahora nos asegura que los niveles nominales de PCB que detectamos en la pintura del techo se puedan quitar sin ningún percance. Tomamos esta decisión bajo la cuidadosa asesoría de especialistas de renombre en el país y con la Comisión de Salud Pública de Boston. Ellos, al igual que el Departamento de Salud Pública nos informaron que nuestra evaluación ambiental y plan de remediación va mucho más allá de lo que otras ciudades y distritos escolares alrededor de la nación están haciendo y mucho más de lo que las regulaciones federales requieren.

Si tiene alguna inquietud, por favor llame a nuestra línea directa de regreso a

Si tiene alguna inquietud, por favor llame a nuestra línea directa de regreso a clases a partir del lunes al 617-635-9046. Esperamos obtener un plan de trabajo para este proyecto en la próxima semana y se lo comunicaremos a ustedes. Si es necesario trasladar a los estudiantes al edificio de la escuela Agassiz a principio de clases, programaremos una reunión con los padres de la Hennigan y del Centro Infantil de la Zona Oeste para que puedan hablar directamente con nosotros y obtener respuestas a todas sus preguntas. Nuestra mayor prioridad es mantenerle al tanto de nuestro progreso.

Gracias por su comprensión y su paciencia. Atentamente,

Carol R. Johnson  
Superintendente

*E-mail Matt Rocheleau at [mjrochele@gmail.com](mailto:mjrochele@gmail.com).*



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