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Storm delays word on Hennigan school's possible postponement

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The city's school system saw almost no damage from the past weekend's storm, but Tropical Storm Irene has delayed word on whether a Jamaica Plain elementary school will complete an unforeseen project to allow classes to begin there as scheduled next week.

Boston Public School officials announced [in a letter to families on Aug. 19](#) that work to remove "trace amounts" of a toxin in the old, flaking paint of the James W. Hennigan Elementary School building may delay the opening of the facility past start of the academic year that begins Sept 8.

In that letter, sent four days after the school system received results back from tests for the toxin, [school officials said](#) the amounts of PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, found in the building's paint was "nominal and is not even significant enough to meet federal reporting thresholds."

"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," Carol R. Johnson wrote in that letter.

City school officials had planned to announce further details about a schedule for the project last week.

If the K-5 school on Heath Street is not ready to open when the school year starts, classes for its roughly 700 students will be held temporarily at the Louis Agassiz Elementary School on Child Street, around one-and-a-half miles away from Hennigan elementary, which also houses the West Zone Early Learning Center.

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.

On Friday, school officials said that the work crews' ability to complete the project in time to open the Hennigan as scheduled had become at least partially dependent on the hurricane-turned-tropical storm's severity.

"We're really waiting for the hurricane to do its thing," said Boston schools spokesman Lee McGuire.

Work to remove and repaint the building was scheduled to go on all weekend, he said, but only if conditions were safe and adequate -- like the power staying on -- to do so.

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As of this morning, the spokesman had no official word on the project's status and did not expect to have more information before Monday's end.

"I know our facilities team was going to check on progress today," said McGuire.

He said the city's only school facility that lost power was the Joseph P. Manning Elementary School, also in Jamaica Plain but around two miles southwest of the Hennigan.

That outage "didn't have any impact as far as we can tell. We still have a week before teachers are back in getting classrooms ready and there's no food stored anywhere just yet. At least not in schools," he said by e-mail Monday.

Otherwise, he said, of the city's school system, "We fared really well."

Beside the temporary outage at Manning, "that was about it besides small branches," McGuire said.

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