Dear VCS Community and Staff,

Since early February we have been working with environmental experts and building engineers to conduct extensive diagnostic testing of the indoor air quality at Sunset Lake Elementary School. The testing started after staff members expressed concern that an employee illness could be related to problems with the indoor air quality. While there were no obvious signs of poor indoor air quality, a thorough investigation was conducted to rule out any hazardous environmental contaminants.

The president of Nova Environmental, Kary Amin, met with representatives from the community and staff members on March 25, 2019, at Sunset Lake Elementary to answer questions and address concerns. There have been two additional air-sampling diagnostic tests conducted and the following is a summary of events and information we have at this time:

- The administration directed Mr. Amin to perform additional air sampling for mold as well as airborne PCB compounds and to review overall air-quality parameters.
- The administration arranged for Mr. Amin to perform a third-round of sampling on March 29 and provided a maintenance staff member to assist in any way necessary. Mr. Amin worked closely with interested employees to tour the buildings, observe sampling protocols, and to inspect specific areas of concern. Sampling and inspections were performed in multiple locations throughout the building, many at staff request.
- Over spring break, the administration requested a thorough cleaning from its custodial contractor, Grand Rapids Building Services, including a low-moisture extraction of all carpets in the building that minimizes the likelihood of mold growth.
- Upon learning from Mr. Amin that indoor carbon-dioxide concentrations were higher than anticipated or desired, the administration asked its mechanical contractor, R.W. LaPine to inspect the unit ventilators to ensure proper, efficient function and appropriate fresh-air introduction. During this inspection, they discovered that numerous fresh-air intakes were blocked with foam-insulation board.
  - This was an important discovery that may explain elevated carbon-dioxide concentrations. We have determined that this action was taken many years ago in an effort to reduce the likelihood of unit ventilator coils freezing in the winter, which leads to rupture of the hot-water coils and flooding of classrooms.
The foam-insulation boards have been removed and we will perform additional carbon-dioxide (CO2) monitoring to determine if the overall levels are reduced. It is important to note that while the CO2 levels were well below thresholds considered dangerous, they were observed at levels that could make rooms feel stuffy and uncomfortable, and potentially even cause headaches for some people.

While we are attempting to find information regarding when and why this occurred, we have removed all foam-insulation board, which we hope will result in an immediate reduction in carbon-dioxide levels. It is important to note that none of the carbon-dioxide readings represented a health hazard but were high enough to cause an uncomfortable environment.

- As had been previously scheduled, all unit ventilator air-filters were replaced over spring break.
- The administration has contacted the Kalamazoo County chief medical officer to request assistance by reviewing lists of symptoms and complaints to determine if any patterns exist that could indicate an exposure to environmental contaminants. We believe this medical and public health expertise will be crucial as we determine how to proceed with future testing and investigation.
- The final written report from Nova Environmental has not been released to us yet, but we have been verbally notified that the mold-sampling indicated levels within reasonable ranges and did not appear to show any sort of mold infestation. We were also told that the presence of PCB’s was not detected in any of the air samples taken on March 25, 2019. As always, the complete results will be released to the public when the school district receives them.

The concern with environmental safety and desire to provide a safe environment for students and staff at all times is a top priority for Vicksburg Community Schools. We want to remind everyone that the air quality is safe, and we will continue to rule out any potentially unsafe conditions and address them immediately.

A new SCHOOL SAFETY section has been added to the VCS website to include reports, communication documents and information about the school district’s next steps to address this area. The website can be found at vicksburgcommunityschools.org.

If anyone has questions or would like further information, please contact Assistant Superintendent Stephen Goss at SGoss@vicksburgschools.org or 269-321-1005.

Sincerely,

Keevin O’Neill
Superintendent of Schools

Stephen Goss
Assistant Superintendent