



# VERONA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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To: Dr. Christopher Tamburro, VEA President

From: Dr. Rui Dionisio, Superintendent of Schools

Cc: Verona Board of Education; Dan Roberts, Esq.; VEA Executive Committee; Luis Delgado, NJEA UniServ Field Representative; Edward Lesser, NJEA UniServ Consultant

Date: September 24, 2020

Re: Health & Safety Response

This correspondence is in response to the VEA communication on September 17, 2020 regarding the health and safety of the Verona Public School District schools. Upon the request of the VEA, the Verona Public School District arranged for a health and safety walk-through on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 of the five school buildings that would open on the first day of school. A number of stakeholders were present for these walk-throughs, including district staff with expertise in the areas of ventilation and public health. I participated in these meetings along with the following representatives: Lisa Freschi (VBOE President), Joseph Higgins (Facility Coordinator), Dennis James (HVAC Maintenance Specialist), Robert Merkler (Director of Athletics & Special Programs), Christopher Tamburro (VEA President), Ed Lesser (NJEA Rep), Principals, Head Custodians, School Nurses, VEA Building Reps, and SCA Parents. It is also important to note that our school district has been collaborating with our district physician, the Montclair Health Department, and our environmental services consulting firm on issues of public health and indoor air quality to ensure that safety and health concerns are addressed.

We remain committed to upgrading our ventilation systems in five schools through the referendum project, and are continuing to do so through the required bidding process. While this process is ongoing, please know that the existing ventilation system in our schools has been verified by our HVAC specialist to be operational and functioning appropriately, providing fresh air exchange that exceeds the minimum recommendations under the public health and air quality standards. In the majority of circumstances, the recommended minimum fresh air exchange is not contingent upon staff maintaining open classroom windows. Staff who decide to open classroom windows will affect the fluctuations in air temperature within the classroom space. Windows that are left open overnight, as well as during the day, will naturally bring in cool air into the classroom or office space. As has always been the case, faculty should plan accordingly and dress appropriately. Please note that any staff member who has a specific facility issue must report the issue through the facility work order request system. Once the requests are received, our maintenance department will address each matter accordingly.

Our maintenance and facility department has been working for months in preparation for our return to school. During our facility walkthroughs, any additional areas that were identified as requiring examination were addressed prior to the start of school on September 14th. The following points provide an overview of the measures that have been taken across our district schools:

- The district repaired exhaust fans and improved ventilation in restrooms (student, faculty, nurse, classrooms).
- All roof top units and interior univent filters were replaced as part of our regular maintenance schedule. Under the current public health conditions and as an additional protective and proactive measure, the district will replace air filters more frequently than the manufacturer recommendation.
- As per manufacturer recommendation, Minimum Efficiency Reporting Values (MERV) for filter ratings of 7 or 8 are used in the majority of our ventilation mechanical systems throughout the district. In some instances, installing a MERV filter that is higher (i.e. 13) may be appropriate if suitable and per manufacturer recommendation in these designated units. However, installing filters that are not suitable to manufacturer specifications will restrict air flow in classrooms and offices, thereby reducing ventilation, and is not recommended. Furthermore, exceeding manufacturer recommendations could cause the univent motors to fail and become inoperable. ASHRAE recommends using MERV 13 only *if equipment allows*.
- All window repairs were completed at four of our schools. Window replacement at F.N. Brown and H.B. Whitehorne is slated for November 2020. Our principals and custodial/maintenance staff have and will continue to make arrangements in any areas that may have potential issues. Ventilation is operational in designated classrooms.
- Based on the guidance of the Montclair Health Department, staff may remove their masks in ventilated indoor spaces while maintaining a minimum physical distance of six feet as long as there are no students physically present in the space (i.e. staff lunch period).

- Offices maintain return of fresh air with operational windows and/or rooftop units.
- Air purifiers have been installed as needed in designated locations.
- Disinfectant materials being utilized by the district are safe for school use. Classroom cleaning will occur after teachers leave the classroom for the day unless a specific circumstance requires immediate cleaning of an area.
- Each open school had hand sanitizers and sanitizing wipes provided to every classroom. Hand sanitizing stations were installed in every hallway. Paper toilet seat cover dispensers were installed in every faculty bathroom. The district has ensured that existing handwashing stations with soap and water are available for use. Appropriate signage encourages handwashing.
- Each open school had signage installed that identifies traffic flow in common areas such as hallways.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) has been and will continue to be provided throughout the district. Multiple masks have been made available to every staff member. Gowns have been provided to paraprofessionals and teachers. Other equipment was purchased and provided as needed and requested.
- Protocols detailing student/staff health screenings, and the district's response to students or staff that test positive for COVID-19 are in place, should the district need to respond and communicate appropriately in our collaboration with the Montclair Health Department. Isolation of symptomatic individuals, with continued supervision and care for students, and contact tracing is conducted by the local health officials.

Thank you for your patience, cooperation, and support which are vital to our collective success in meeting the needs of our students and community. I look forward to working with you as we continue to move toward our school reopening efforts. Stay safe and be well.

All my best,



Dr. Rui Dionisio

Superintendent of Schools