

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 27, 2019

Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor
NYC Department of Education
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Oxiris Barbot, MD
Commissioner
NYC Department of Health
and Mental Hygiene
42-09 28th Street
Long Island City, NY 11101

Dear Chancellor Carranza and Commissioner Barbot:

We write to express our concerns over a recent local investigation of lead paint contamination in New York City's public schools.¹ Media reports suggest that dust samples from at least four schools contain lead levels "that far exceed safety limits adopted by the city's health department."² In addition to dust, peeling paint in classrooms and other school facilities may expose children to lead. Such exposure to lead can create serious developmental consequences for children and cause impaired cognitive functioning, which academic research suggests is irreversible.³ Furthermore, the United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) notes there is no level of safe exposure to lead, and notes that there is considerable risk for children who are under the age of six.⁴

While current media reports suggest that four schools have tested positive for high levels of lead contamination, it is important to note that this is a random sample from multiple boroughs. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to conclude that the number of schools where students are exposed to high levels of lead is potentially significant. **We are also alarmed that this report comes days before the start of summer school, summer enrichment programs and the free summer meals program.** It is plausible that students who participate in these programs will be disproportionately affected by hazardous lead levels. Furthermore, it is also likely that lower-income students experiencing food insecurity during the summer may also be at risk of such exposure.

Therefore, we call on your agencies to immediately begin a collaborative response effort to identify the scope of current lead issues. **We specifically ask that your agencies prioritize identification of lead-based conditions in facilities that will be open for summer school or other activities.** With these programs beginning next week, it is critical that we ensure that children are not going to be exposed to hazardous conditions when the intent of their participation in summer programs is to enrich their academic potential. We immediately request the following:

¹ Werth C. WNYC Finds High Levels Of Lead-Paint Contamination In Four NYC Schools. Gothamist. (2019, June 24). Retrieved from https://gothamist.com/2019/06/24/nyc_lead_paint_schools_doe.php

² Id.

³ Mason LH, Harp JP, Han DY. Pb neurotoxicity: neuropsychological effects of lead toxicity. Biomed Res Int. (2014;2014:840547).; Bellinger DC. Lead. Pediatrics. (2004;113(4):1016-1022.)

⁴ Prevention Tips. CDC. (2014, June 19). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips.htm>

- 1) The testing of lead levels at schools that will be open for summer classes and programs. In addition to this test, the NYC Department of Education (DOE) should specify the number of students projected to enroll at such schools;
- 2) The testing of lead levels in public school cafeterias that will be providing breakfast and lunch as part of the free summer meals program. In addition to this test, the NYC DOE should specify the number of individuals projected to receive meals at these sites;
- 3) The publication of the results of the above testing on the NYC DOE's website; and
- 4) Should the above tests suggest levels of lead above the City's standards (i.e. the city's new lead in dust standards⁵) in school facilities, the NYC DOE's plan to accommodate students at alternate sites that demonstrate non-hazardous levels of lead.

Upon completion of the above time-sensitive elements, we seek further information regarding:

- 1) Your respective agencies' plans to test all public schools that are not open for summer school, including a timeline of when inspections are to be scheduled;
- 2) The intended timeline for the availability of such information to elected officials and the general public; and
- 3) The proposed plan and timeline by your agencies to ameliorate current issues.

Unfortunately, for many of us, lead issues are nothing new. In fact, many of us have previously voiced our concern over the presence of lead in school fixtures and drinking fountains at New York City public schools.⁶ Like you, we are fully aware that these challenges were not created overnight, but we must all work together to resolve this problem immediately and ensure that New York City schools are ready to receive students.⁷ Families should have the peace of mind knowing that their children are attending schools that are safe and free of dangerous lead levels. We look forward to addressing this issue with you.

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

⁵ Lead in Dust Standards – New Requirements <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/lead/lead-in-dust-standards.pdf>

⁶ Letter from Representative Nydia Velázquez to New York City School Chancellor Carmen Fariña. (2017, May 18). Retrieved from: <https://velazquez.house.gov/sites/velazquez.house.gov/files/Letter%20to%20Farina.pdf>

⁷ Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Act (NYC Local Law 1 of 2004). <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/owners/Lead-Based-Paint.page>



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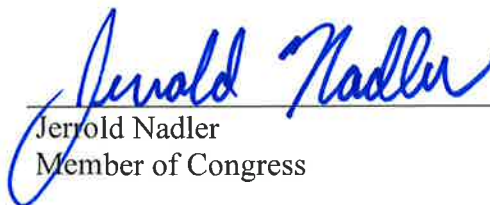
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