



## **CORNELIUS PTO - SUMMARY OF TIMELINE & CONCERNS (Updated 10/30/20)**

The Cornelius Elementary Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) Board would like to update you on a recent development with respect to the condition of Cornelius Elementary School (CES). Below is a timeline of these events, along with our concerns and suggested actions.

**August 3, 2020:** The PTO Board received reports of troubling photos and accounts circulating on social media relating to mold, insufficient HVAC systems, damaged technology and furniture, and overall unsafe conditions in the CES building. The apparent cause of these issues was an increase in humidity in the school during the quarantine period when Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) turned off the HVAC system. The Board met with Principal Holbrook, who confirmed the issues. Numerous work orders had been submitted by Principal Holbrook and school administration, but had not been addressed or repaired by CMS.

An email was sent by the PTO to CMS outlining the issues, and with the following demands:

- swift and thorough diagnosis of the cause and damages relating to temperature, humidity, air circulation and mold throughout the school
- appropriate repairs, and/or replacement of systems and equipment, as well as replacement or cleaning of the items damaged by mold and insufficient repairs
- ongoing, periodic checks by an independent company (not the contractor that performs the repairs) to ensure optimal humidity levels are maintained and mold or other harmful elements are not present in our building
- transparency, communication and follow-up as to the status of these projects

CMS did not respond directly to the PTO, but communicated with Principal Holbrook who shared their progress. Over the subsequent weeks, contractors were sent to the school. High volume dehumidifiers were installed and extensive surface cleaning was done. However, additional concerns remained. The PTO Board voted to move forward with the aforementioned inspection to determine how the events of the summer had affected air quality conditions at our school.

**September 23, 2020:** An inspection was performed by Environmental Services Group Carolinas, LLC (ESG) an independent environmental testing company. Hired by the CES PTO, and paid for with PTO funds, the group had no affiliation to CMS. The company does not perform repairs, and has no financial interest in the findings. Representatives from an independent HVAC company and the PTO Board were present. Three rooms from various

areas of the building were selected for testing. Extensive samples from were sent out for testing. The initial data from the report was provided on September 29, 2020.

**October 6, 2020:** A verbal summary and explanation of the report was presented by ESG to representatives from the PTO Board. Significant concerns were noted. A meeting was scheduled with Principal Holbrook for 9:00 a.m. the following morning.

**October 7, 2020:** Representatives from the PTO Board met with Principal Holbrook and shared their concerns. Principal Holbrook notified CMS of the issues, forwarded the full report to them, and requested that a meeting be scheduled as soon as possible. CMS responded by requesting a list of questions be forwarded for their review prior to a meeting.

The PTO Board immediately held an emergency meeting to discuss next steps. The PTO Board voted to request a written summary of the findings from ESG, and began making preparations to distribute the information to teachers and parents.

The written summary was provided to the PTO Board. It was forwarded to Principal Holbrook and CMS. The full report, report summary, this Summary of Timeline & Concerns and a contact list for CMS officials, were prepared for release to parents and uploaded to the [PTO website](#).

**October 8, 2020:** The PTO Board held a call to approve an initial action plan and all documents for distribution. A list of questions was submitted to CMS. CMS has not responded with meeting dates. Principal Holbrook notified the teachers and staff of the report findings. The PTO Board sent an email, along with a link to all report findings and supporting documents, to all available contacts within the PTO Membership.

**October 9, 2020:** CMS was onsite with their vendor COIT to perform the following tasks in the three sample classrooms tested by ESG: 1) deep surface cleaning 2) deep clean the unit ventilators, 3) perform an antimicrobial treatment and seal off/encapsulate the HVAC unit's interior lining (insulation). Additionally, the ceiling tile that indicated growth signs would be replaced.

PTO Board representatives participated in a virtual meeting with CMS and received additional information on steps going forward. Updates included the following:

- Additional testing and repairs would take place over the weekend and into the early week of 10/12. CMS agreed that additional environmental testing would also take place in the 26 other rooms by a 3rd party vendor. The PTO asked that common areas be included in the testing as well.
- A Zoom meeting would be scheduled for teachers, administration and CMS on 10/14. The PTO requested to be on the call and was granted permission.

- The PTO posed questions asked by parents in the PTO Survey relating to a number of topics. There is a call scheduled between the PTO and CMS leadership on 10/15 in which follow up questions will be addressed. No updates are available at this time as to how this issue will affect a return to school for teachers or in-person instruction.

**October 15/16, 2020:** PTO leadership attended a Zoom call with Principal Holbrook, members of CMS and School Board Representative Rhonda Cheek. CMS outlined the repairs that have been done since the release of the ESG report to parents. Additional testing was performed by CMS through their third-party vendor and the CMS Environmental team. CMS indicated the results had been received the afternoon of 10/15. The PTO requested a copy. CMS agreed to send the report after it had been reviewed by their team, and gave permission for it to be shared and reviewed by ESG.

The PTO requested access to the school on an ongoing basis for additional testing by ESG. This request was denied. The PTO requested that a future testing schedule be created and performed by a third party vendor. CMS is considering this request.

The PTO asked for further clarification on how a return to school plan would be affected by the conditions and repairs of the school. CMS indicated that they did not feel there was any evidence to show that the school was not safe and did not have plans to delay the opening of the school based on the status of these repairs.

At this time, no additional calls have been scheduled, but CMS and Principal Holbrook have indicated that they remain open to feedback and questions from parents.

**October 20, 2020:** No environmental reports/results have been received by the PTO at this time, including the aforementioned report that CMS received on 10/15. We are still awaiting the scheduling announcement for further testing.

CMS sent out a communication to parents. CMS outlined classroom repairs and indicated that “air quality had significantly improved” due to corrective actions that had been taken. They did not release the findings of their report, specific ranges/numbers or information on any additional mold sources/issues found in their investigation. CMS stated that the reports were not complete but would be forthcoming. Testing will continue throughout the common areas of the school, and the report will be shared with the PTO.

The PTO replied asking for clarification on whether or not the comprehensive Crossroads report had been received by CMS on 10/15, as they originally reported, and asked where parents could find the reports. CMS replied that they are scheduling a meeting to discuss the reports with Superintendent Winston and School Board Member Rhonda Cheek, and that logistics related to sharing would be discussed soon.

**October 22, 2020:** No environmental reports/results have been received by the PTO at this time, including the aforementioned report that CMS received on 10/15. We are still awaiting the scheduling announcement for further testing.

**October 23, 2020:** CES PTO contacted CMS inquiring as to when the report results would be made available. CMS called a meeting at 3:00pm with Principal Holbrook, members of CES staff and teachers, PTO leadership and members of the CMS team to discuss the report and answer questions. The PTO reiterated their request for CMS to provide a schedule of ongoing testing. Following this meeting, CMS sent a communication to parents and released the results of testing in 8 classrooms. [View the report here.](#) The PTO has sent the results to ESG (the company that performed the initial inspection for the PTO) for review.

Additional environmental testing that will include common areas and additional classrooms is scheduled to take place on 10/24. The PTO asked that these results be released prior to the start of in-person instruction. CMS agreed to do so.

**October 28, 2020:** PTO leadership had a conference call with representatives of ESG, the independent environmental company that conducted the initial mold inspection. They reviewed the report that was released by CMS on 10/23 and indicated that there were significant improvements in the sample rooms.

CES PTO sent an email to CMS to check the status of the report from the inspection performed on 10/24 (including additional classrooms and common areas). The PTO asked questions in follow up to the ESG report review and for clarification as to when the needlepoint bipolar ionization units for Cornelius Elementary would be installed. The PTO again requested a schedule for ongoing testing (winter and summer per ESG recommendations).

**October 30, 2020:** CMS released the second independent report from Crossroads. [Review the report here.](#) CMS also indicated that they were working on the schedule for ongoing testing and would communicate in the next week with additional information. The needlepoint bipolar ionization system is still in the bidding process but expected to be installed in February, 2021.

## **PTO POSITION**

Building condition concerns at CES are longstanding and cumulative. CMS has not been proactive, responsive, or thorough in addressing the needs and requests of the CES Administration.

Additional testing should be performed throughout the entire school by an independent contractor, and the report shared, in order to ensure it is safe for our teachers, staff and students to return. Testing must be ongoing and transparent.

Providing a safe and healthy environment for teachers and students is the responsibility of CMS. The PTO should not need to perform investigations, or fund the basic services required to ensure that this obligation is met.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

The CES PTO Board strives to represent the interests and concerns of the CES Community. We will continue to inform all CES teachers and parents of the issues raised in the environmental report/s. We will do this by providing complete findings from all inspections, as well as an outline of our response to this issue. This will be available on the PTO website.

We will coordinate with school administrators and teachers to form a committee with the goal of returning students to a safe learning environment as soon as possible.

We will insist that CMS officials and contractors meet their obligation to provide for the health of students and faculty, and the safety of the school.

We seek to solicit suggestions from the PTO Membership on how to best move forward. It is our goal that teacher and parent groups work together to form one consistent voice. We are stronger together.