



September 28, 2020

Sent via Electronic Mail

Dr. Peter J. Kopack, Superintendent of Schools
Long Beach Island Board of Education
201 20th Street
Ship Bottom, New Jersey 08008

RE: LONG BEACH ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION (Board/District)
Re: Facilities Inquiry

Dear Dr. Kopack:

We are in receipt of your email and the letter inquiring as to what the District is doing to protect children and staff and whether HVAC filtration systems will be changed by installing MERV-13 or better filters rather than the MERV-8 filters currently being used. It has been asserted that the District's use of MERV-8 filters is woefully insufficient to filter out Covid-19 particles and that MERV-13 filters should be used to provide better air filtration in the schools.

The New Jersey Department of Education issued a report in June 2020 entitled "The Road Back Restart and Recovery Plan for Education" with its own guidelines and Anticipated Minimum Standards. These standards "refer to items that school districts should incorporate into their reopening plans as definite components related to health, safety, and operations." The provisions within the Road Back are informed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidance.

The Road Back separates ten different "crucial areas of operation" which each District should address in planning to reopen. Although all critical areas should be addressed, "General Health and Safety Guidelines" along with "Classrooms, Testing, and Therapy Rooms" provide what Districts should do and plan for prior to reopening.

The Anticipated Minimum Standards for General Health and Safety Guidelines provide that taking behaviors such as staying home when appropriate, emphasizing hand hygiene, using face coverings, and implementing signs and messages for social distancing will combat the virus' spread. In terms of the classroom, it is important to emphasize distancing between students. However, since that is not always practical with every District, other methods should be implemented to further ensure the safety of children and staff.

The Road Back provides that one of the main ways this can be done is ensuring that “indoor facilities have adequate ventilation, including operational heating, and ventilation systems where appropriate.” Although indoor ventilation can be increased by opening windows, weather may not always permit for such a solution. Thus, having filters in HVAC units can help provide more filtration. The Road Back mentions that “filters for A/C units must be maintained and changed according to manufacturer recommendations.” However, the Road Back does not require or recommend a particular type of MERV filter to be installed with the current HVAC system.


The CDC also updated their considerations on ventilation on August 21, 2020. The CDC recommends updating or improving ventilation systems where practical and to ensure that they work properly to provide acceptable indoor air quality for the occupancy level of each space. Most importantly, schools should increase air filtration as high as possible without diminishing airflow. While the CDC recommends reviewing ASHRAE guidelines, which suggest upgrading air filtration to MERV-13 or the highest compatible, it is not required to reopen schools. The CDC lists several activities that may provide increased air filtration, such as: opening windows, using fans, ensuring through inspection that ventilation systems are properly working and decreasing occupancy in areas where ventilation is poor.

The Executive Director of New Jersey School Buildings and Grounds Association further provided that MERV-13 filters may not be compatible with the vents already in place within the District.

It is not necessary nor required to upgrade and implement MERV-13 filtration systems over the existing MERV-8 filters. Both the Road Back and CDC emphasize the need to have as much ventilation as possible, but do not require a particular type of filter system. This is also why both the Road Back and CDC provide alternative methods to help increase the air ventilation in schools while also advocating other safety measures such as using face coverings, placing signs in classrooms to remind students and staff to remain distanced, and hand hygiene.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,
SCIARRILLO, CORNELL, MERLINO, McKEEVER & OSBORNE, LLC


Anthony P. Sciarrillo
APS,amm

cc: Christine Kelly, Business Administrator/Board Secretary
Colette Southwick, Board President