



NEWS RELEASE – San Diego Unified School District Partners with Statewide Environmental Advocacy Organization to Guarantee Lowest Drinking Water Lead Levels In California

September 14, 2017

SAN DIEGO – San Diego Unified School District leaders were joined by CALPIRG Thursday to announce bold standards contained within the district’s new plan to protect kids from lead in drinking water, and to provide a progress report on water testing and remediation efforts.

While 94% of all samples drawn by the City of San Diego did not detect any level of lead, the new plan, adopted by the school board in July, set a strict action level of 5 parts per billion (ppb) for lead in drinking water. The new action level is one third of the state and federal government action level of 15 ppb and matches the Food and Drug Administration’s standard for bottled drinking water.

“As parents and community leaders, we understand the issue of lead exposure for children is more than a school issue. Ninety-four percent of our school water samples had no detectable levels of lead in them,” said board President Richard Barrera. “The fact our district has said that’s not good enough, and we want to get to 100 percent because we want to have the cleanest water in the state – that is something that should make our city and our school families proud.”

The new plan requires the retroactive remediation of lead found in exceedance of 5ppb by drinking water sampling conducted by the City of San Diego in April-June 2017, even when those levels met state and federal water quality standards. To ensure all water outlets that may be used for drinking or food preparation meet the district’s strict new standard, the district will sample all of the remaining water outlets used for human consumption across the entire district and will make physical repairs anytime lead is found above 5ppb. Physical repairs could include replacement of the fixture, piping replacement, or the installation of point-of-use filtration for lead.

“There is no safe amount of lead in the water for our children. I’m thrilled that my proposal was adopted unanimously by the Board of Education to go above and beyond state and federal standards to mitigate lead in the water at our San Diego schools”, said board Vice President Kevin Beiser. “Thanks to the leadership of Superintendent Cindy Marten, our staff have worked to implement this board direction to make our schools even safer for all our children.”

The drinking water sampling effort will include early childhood education facilities and central offices, which were excluded from the State Water Resources Control Board school sampling program. The district-wide sampling effort is expected to take 3 years to complete and will

initially focus on sites previously identified by the city as having lead levels that met state and federal standards but exceed the district's new action level. By 2020, district staff will produce a menu of options to be presented to the school board that would allow for the district to reduce the action level to 1 ppb.

"With this new policy, San Diego Unified is taking an important step forward to protect children's health from lead exposure," said Jason Pfeifle, Public Health Advocate with CALPIRG. "They should be applauded. We look forward to working with the district on further steps, including a plan to meet a 1 part per billion standard for lead in drinking water."

Throughout the summer, district staff continued remediation efforts at Birney Elementary School after lead was identified above the state and federal action level. Utilizing a combination of remediation methods, including replacement of several drinking water fixtures, some piping replacement, and the installation of water filters at several locations, district staff took additional water samples to ensure the entire campus met the district's new water standard. Remediation efforts were completed this week, making Birney Elementary the first school where drinking water is below 5ppb throughout the entire campus.

As the drinking water sampling effort moves forward, the district remains committed to notifying parents of results and posting them online. Those interested in viewing detailed water sampling reports, learning more about the district's water sampling effort, or learning more about lead poisoning prevention may visit www.sandiegounified.org/watersampling.

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